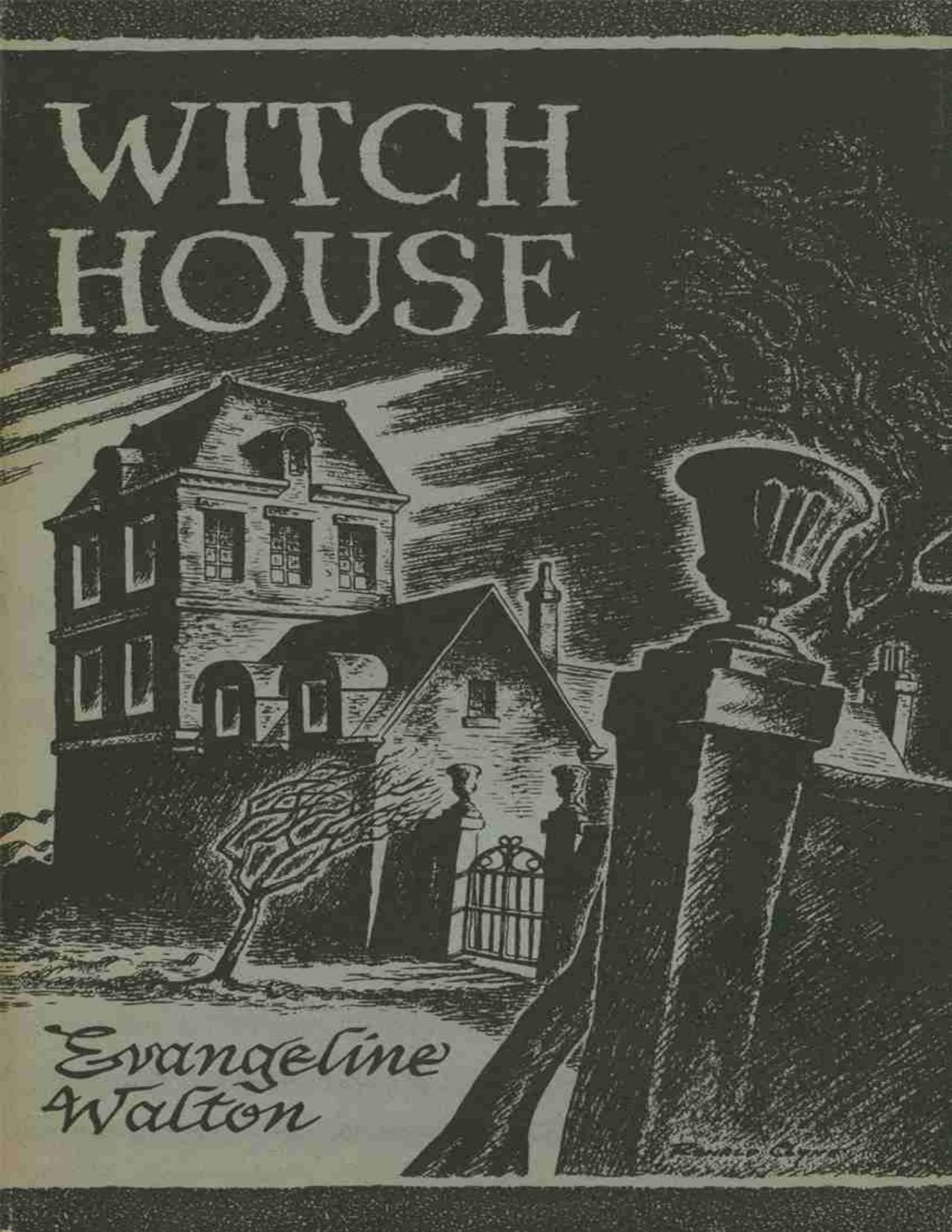
WITCH HOUSE



Evangeline Walton

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WITCH HOUSE

By Evangeline Walton

When Elizabeth Stone sought the aid of Dr. Gaylord Carew to save her child, Betty-Ann, from strange and terrible danger, he soon discovered that a malign and horrible influence was at work in the lonely house off the New England coast. The others in the house—Joseph, Quincy, and Zoia—maintained that Betty-Ann suffered tantrums; Betty-Ann herself believed that the evil ghost of old Miss Sarai reached across the divide to torment her. The things that happened to Betty-Ann suggested sorcery to Dr. Carew, and when he sought to combat them, he found the vengeful influence behind them turned upon him as well.

Events move rapidly toward climax and anti-climax in this skillfully written novel which in its theme suggests Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw,* and in its treatment Francis Brett Young's *Cold Harbour,* though it is a completely original work of marked power and a fine quality of imaginative adventure. Miss Walton's style is persuasive as well as powerful; *Witch House* is the product of a keenly imaginative and well disciplined mind.

««««

The jacket has been designed by Ronald Clyne.

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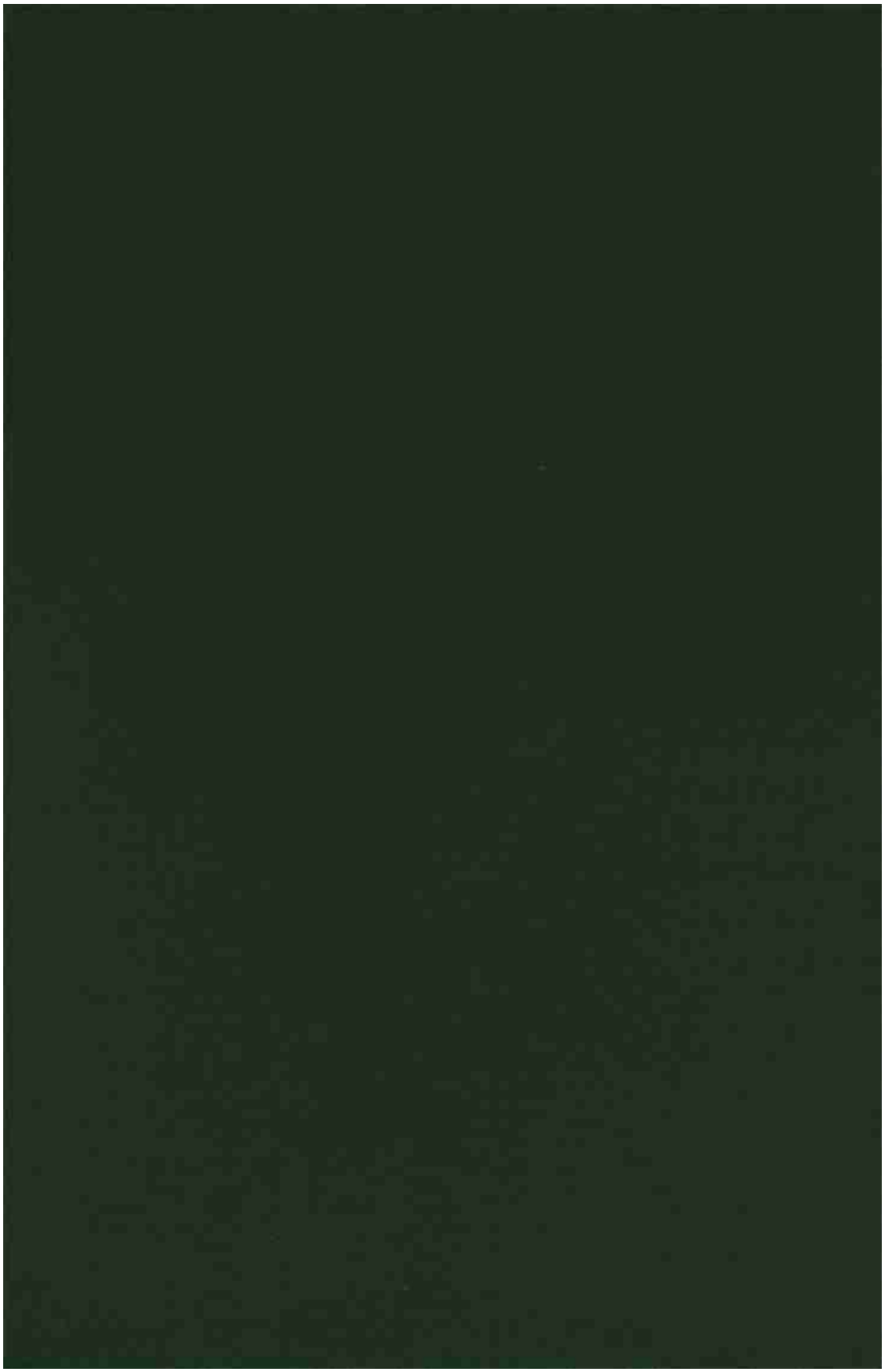

Witch House

BY

EVANGELINE WALTON

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EVANGELINE WALTON

Arkham House Sauk City, Wisconsin

1945

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Books by Evangeline Walton

THE VIRGIN AND THE SWINE
WITCH HOUSE

WITCH HOUSE is the first volume in the Library of Arkham House Novels of Fantasy and Terror. Other volumes in preparation include the following:

THE HORROR FROM THE HILLS
by Frank Belknap Long

THE TRAIL OF CTHULHU
by August Derleth

CONJURE WIFE
by Fritz Leiber, Jr.

THE LURKER AT THE THRESHOLD
by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth

INVADERS FROM THE DARK
by Greye La Spina

To my Quaker Grandmother
a staunch believer in this book
and to “Tuneless Thomas”
who was a kind of collaborator.

TABLE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Joseph de Quincy (1618-1690) built Witch House

m. Elizabeth Harper

Sarai Quincy
m. Elias Marlin

(No issue).

Joseph Quincy
m. Mary Chapman

Descendants of Captain "Pegleg" Quincy (1795-1875), great-grandson of Joseph Quincy and Mary Chapman

By Esther Barret (1799-1845)

James — John — Samuel

John Quincy
m. Ann Ward

Miss Sarai Quincy (No issue).

Thomas Quincy
m. Helena Blair

Elizabeth Ann Quincy
m. Hugh Stone

Betty-Ann Stone

By Li Wan (1844-1875)

Joseph Lee (Li)
m. Marie Rousseau

Joseph Lee
m Cecile Cambon

Joseph Lee

Quincy Lee
m. Zoia Naryshkin

Witch House

For spirits, when they please,
Can either sex assume, or both; so soft
And uncompounded is their essence pure . . .
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,
Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose,
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure,
Can execute their aery purposes,
And works of love or enmity fulfill.

—John Milton.

It is difficult to examine the subject with impartiality without coming to the conclusion that the historical evidence establishing the reality of witchcraft is so vast and so varied that nothing but our . . . modern experience of the manner in which it has faded away under the influence of civilization can justify us in despising it. . . . The subject was examined in tens of thousands of cases in almost every country in Europe . . . with the assistance of innumerable sworn witnesses. . . . If we considered witchcraft probable, a hundredth part of the evidence we possess would have placed it beyond the region of doubt. If it were a natural but very improbable fact, our reluctance to believe it would have been completely stifled by the multiplicity of the proofs.

—*W. E. H. Lecky,* History of the Rise and Progress of Rationalism in Western Europe.

I

THERE WAS A QUIET, informal dignity about Dr. Gaylord Carew's office on West Forty-fifth Street. Not the look of a workroom, no professional austerity; nor was it like the richly-padded offices of many fashionable nerve specialists. An intricately figured old Persian carpet made a warm soft dimness under walls of cool olive green; the patients' chairs were comfortable and simple, the doctor's desk plain but not angular: a scholar's. Wide windows showed a vista of flat roof-tops and occasional pale towers sweeping seaward under a vast blue arch of sky.

How careful a design underlay the pleasant quiet of that room its master never explained. The absence of all stiffness or display or sense of rushing efficiency, the atmosphere of effortless and tranquilizing calm that closed in upon a patient with the closing of that office-door—to sick and tormented nerves these were like a kind of spiritual poultice, the first steps of Gaylord Carew's treatment.

He himself had some quality that was both tranquilizing and invigorating: an unemotional and understanding friendliness, a quiet strength that seemed to tune, even harmonize, the jangled, self-torturing organisms with which he dealt to his own rate of vibration. He was a skilled physician, but the skill seemed merely subordinate, a technical framework he used to express something else.

But he was not treating the man who sat before him now: the thin, trim, white-haired man who was a lawyer in a little New England town not far from that village above Nantucket where Carew's mother had been born. The lawyer was not a patient, but he showed a kind of controlled nervousness, a reluctance to explain what he had come to discuss.

"Mrs. Stone went to school with a daughter of Mrs. Jonathan Stafford of Boston, an old friend of your mother's, I believe. She quite understands that that gives her no claim on your friendship—only a slim one on your courtesy. But she needs every claim to courtesy, even the poorest. This isn't a case she could bring to many doctors; she seems to feel, for some reason, that she can bring it to you."

Gaylord Carew watched him unsmilingly.

"You want me to cure a child who must live in a haunted house of being haunted? That's what it boils down to, isn't it?"

"Well," the old lawyer grinned a little sheepishly, "I guess you could come nearer calling it that than anything else." His blue glance flashed out, frank and level. "And I won't blame you if you call it unmitigated rubbish. Anybody would. But it's a serious enough business for Elizabeth Quincy Stone, her husband dying the way he died and now this queer streak coming out in her child. She says the child was a sunny little piece when they lived in Boston—not a trick or a tantrum in her. Now—"

"You don't think a mother's testimony as to her child's character could be considered unbiased enough to be worth much?" Gaylord Carew's eyes were smiling quizzically now, though his lips were grave.

“I’d expect you to think that.” The lawyer’s smile was dry. “I’ve an eye for weak points in my own cases; it’s as essential as one for your opponent’s.”

“I did not think it; I saw that you thought it. I shouldn’t judge your client, whatever her natural bias, an unintelligent woman or a weak one. Her letter—I suppose you know its contents?—came in the morning post.” He smiled for the first time, the flash of white teeth making the lean dark aquiline face seem younger. “You don’t have to make an emotional plea to get a hearing from me, Mr. Barret. I’ve very few opinions; I’m waiting.”

“I’ve no opinions to offer about the child. I agree with you about the mother. I’ve known her ever since she was younger than this little girl of hers. It’s a pity she couldn’t come herself. She could describe the case to you; I can’t. I know it only second-hand, and it sounds like nightmare to me.”

“You were sent because she could not come; she dared not leave the youngster, and it was no use to bring her ‘because she seems normal enough by daylight, away from Witch House.’ An odd phrase and an old name. How did the house come by it?”

Barret looked embarrassed.

“It was a whim of Miss Sarai’s. She was eccentric; she’d been named for an ancestress who was hanged for witchcraft, and she always professed to believe that no martyr’s crown was merited. She was ninety-seven when she died.”

“The aunt whose will compels Mrs. Stone and two cousins to occupy this house for the next ten years?”

“Yes. All three inherit equally—a fair-sized fortune apiece—if they live the allotted time in Witch House: the same

number of years they spent there in childhood. It wasn't a sentimental gesture on Miss Sarai Quincy's part; she was not fond of any of them, except, perhaps, of Joseph. It was another of her eccentricities."

"Nor were the three young people, I gather, fond of each other," Carew mused.

The lawyer started; he had known that, but had not said it. He had the uneasy sensation that the Quincys themselves had often given him, as if thoughts were not private, but visible phenomena working under glass.

"Miss Sarai's eccentricities seem to have been sadistic. Mrs. Stone tells me that I must be acquainted with Witch House before I can understand the case. That you are bringing me some sort of article or story that will give me an idea of it. She was careful to explain"—Carew smiled a little—"that I'd be paid for the time I spend in reading it. Will you give it to me now?"

Barret looked distressed.

"I tried to get her not to send that. It's nothing but an immature effusion her cousin, one of the Lees, wrote for his high-school magazine when he was fifteen. True enough to family history—Mr. Joseph is given to accuracy, and here he hadn't any need of a boy's tendency to over-dramatize—but absurd melodrama, all the same. It's the nonsense of a superstitious age, better forgotten."

"But it might serve to illustrate a good many things. It's the tradition of the house in which the child, whose brain is still in the age of superstition, is living. I'd like to see it."

The lawyer opened his brief-case and took out, still with that air of reluctance, an old, well-worn magazine, open at the title, *Witch House*, by Joseph Lee, and handed it to him.

Carew did not look at it at once. He had been listening to Barret's thoughts far more than to his guarded, defensive words, and the name Lee evoked no images of Southern homesteads and white-pillared porches above Virginian meadows. Rather, of streets streaming with gay lanterns and slant-eyed yellow faces, of gong-notes and vendors' cries, and of the scent of incense burning before monstrous idols in temple dusks.

He fixed his fine dark eyes, with their unusual depths, upon Barret's face, a slightly startled question in them.

"Lee? His mother was a Quincy?"

Barret showed embarrassment again; he looked down.

"No. His great-grandfather was. Captain Pegleg Quincy—they still referred to him by that name when I was a boy, he'd lost a leg on a whaling voyage when he was young—was one of the East India captains. Our last great one. The collapse of the East India trade ruined Harpersville, but not him. Somehow the Quincys always knew how to get out of things just in time. Folks used to say 'tweren't just plain shrewdness; the devil helped his own. Anyway, Captain Pegleg made a big pile out of opium."

"In China?" Carew's whimsical smile was edged. "We are very shocked at Oriental vice when we hear of opium dens in American Chinatowns, but nineteen out of twenty of us don't know that Americans introduced opium into China, that it's only our own chickens coming home to roost."

Barret shrugged his thin old shoulders slightly.

"It's a pleasant thing to forget. But Captain Pegleg brought something very different from chickens home to roost. He was of an exploring turn of mind, and once he penetrated as far inland as the Forbidden City of Pekin. He brought home a Chinese woman he bought there.

“He was a widower past sixty then, with grown children. The eldest son and his wife—Miss Sarai’s father and mother; she was twelve years old then—had been keeping house for him. But you can imagine how quickly they got out of it when the Chinese woman walked into it. It was the biggest scandal Harpersville ever had. Captain Pegleg seems to have enjoyed it; he was afflicted with the family eccentricity. He even let his mistress worship her idols in the house—said they were her blood relations and it wouldn’t be polite to show ’em the door. Her mother’s uncle had been a Buddhist abbot in Mongolia, reputed a great magician or an Incarnate God or something of that sort.”

“I can picture the pleasure of his church-going relatives.” The corners of Carew’s mouth twitched.

“Well,” Barret grinned again, “it wasn’t very great. He had her portrait painted, and it still hangs on the walls of Witch House—a codicil in his will disinherited his legitimate children if it were ever taken down.”

Gaylord Carew laughed, a rich, amused chuckle.

“And their moral sense was not quite sensitive enough to make them refuse the money and the shameful stigma?”

“All the money would have gone to their little half-brother if they had,” Barret said dryly. “He shared with them equally as it was.” He paused a moment, clearly thrusting back some repugnant memory, then hurried on: “When he grew up he went to France, where exotic blood carries no stigma. He became a doctor and married a Frenchwoman of good family, as his son did after him.”

“And his grandchildren are the cousins with whom Mrs. Stone shares Witch House?”

“Yes. When Miss Elizabeth’s father died she was the last Quincy, an eight-year-old girl. Miss Sarai never forgave her for that. She set investigations afoot to find out what had become of her young half-Chinese uncle. When she learned that he and his son were dead she managed to obtain custody of the two grandsons, Joseph and Quincy Lee. She brought the three children up together, meant for one of the boys to marry her great-niece and take the name. But Miss Elizabeth upset her plans by eloping with Hugh Stone when she was eighteen.”

“It is hard to play God. People usually cause considerable breakage when they try it. Young Stone died—I gather from your manner—unpleasantly?”

Barret answered shortly. “He killed himself. He’d been out of work for two years, and their money was nearly all gone. He thought that Elizabeth’s family might take her back if he were gone too. At least that was the excuse he left.”

“And now his child is afflicted with an hysterical mania of some sort? The causes may be natural enough.”

“She doesn’t know her father did not die naturally. Her mother was very careful about that.”

“Yet the shock, the atmosphere of mystery and horror all around her, would be bound to leave a mark. One can never tell exactly how children’s minds will operate; they are so callous in some ways, so sensitive in others.”

“She was all right when she came to Witch House. And it’s not Hugh she thinks she sees.” Barret’s mouth clamped shut, tightly. “Dead or alive, Hugh Stone could never set foot in Witch House. The Quincys would have ghosts enough of their own—if there were ghosts.”

“Whom does she think she sees?”

Barret spoke reluctantly, yet evasively, too, as if this unwilling revelation covered another he would have been even less willing to make. “She is in mad terror, among other things, of a big black hare. Not a natural hare—a spook or a devil. Absurd, of course; there’s not a live animal on the island Witch House stands on. But she claims this thing follows her when she’s out at dusk.”

“Does she know the legendary connection between hares and witches?”

“Elizabeth says not.” Barret spoke with a queer effect of discomfort. “Some things have happened—there always have been queer tales about Witch House. Accidents to the child’s dog and cat—nobody seems to know quite how or what—but she found them mangled. Zoia Lee—Mrs. Quincy Lee—says the child killed them herself. I don’t believe that; the dog was big enough to have been a match for most men; but there *is* something wrong. Two governesses have left; they say the youngster breaks everything she touches and then denies it. She says that ‘Something’ is after her, and breaks the things. She can’t bear to be alone at night—has all sorts of absurd fancies.”

A picture moving in the other’s mind caught Carew’s attention. He asked abruptly, “Have there been tales of inexplicable breakage at Witch House before?”

The lawyer glanced at him again, oddly.

“Elizabeth didn’t tell you that in her letter, though I was thinking of it just now. Old wives’ tales, yes, a lot of them. The only breakage I ever saw at Witch House was entirely natural, though. I was having tea with Miss Sarai when the children were still young. Master Quincy pinched Miss Elizabeth and she threw a cup of the steaming hot tea in his face. He knocked the cup out of her hand, springing at

her. Miss Sarai made the occasion memorable for them both. Because the cup was broken, not because of their manners—she never cared for such details as those. It was hard for Miss Elizabeth," he added hastily. "There never would have been any elopement if she could have a normal girl's life, a normal home."

"I can see why she would hardly have cared to stay and marry the courteous Quincy. And now this home must be her child's also, even with the eccentric Miss Sarai out of it. There are books in the case yonder, Mr. Barret. Will you see if you can entertain yourself with one of them while I read this? It will not take long." He was looking down at the first paragraph under that grim title:

Witch House
or, The Founding of a Family
By Joseph Lee

In the year 1652 there arrived in New England one Joseph de Quincy, a dark man of sober garb and countenance, calling himself a French Huguenot and a leech. He tarried not long in Boston, where he had landed, but went farther up the coast, to the little town now known as Harpersville, saying that there was greater need of leechcraft there. He let it be known that it was because he had grown sick of the popish abominations of the Old World that he had forsaken it for the New, having neither kith nor kin left in France, where the True Faith was held in abhorrance. There were none but believed this the whole truth in those early days. He spoke in a rich voice and smoothly, of God and His Angels, and many sick were healed by him. It was said then, as differently after, that

some strange and great power for invigorating and easing the carnal body dwelt in his hands and his eyes.

But soon strange rumours began to drift about. It was told how in Boston the captain who had brought him thither had, in his cups, told strange tales of him: how, when the ship lay at anchor in a French port, this man, a stranger to him, had been rowed out to it after dark, and had offered him twice the usual passage-money.

That was the night before the ship's sailing. Next morning, as the captain prepared to weigh anchor, he heard an uproar in the town, and was told that the hunt was up for a fleeing wizard who had been traced thither. In a town to the South, near the Pyrenees, a coven of those lost souls who worship Satan had lately been discovered. Thirty wizards and full twice as many witches had been burnt. But the chief warlock, he who had been their Devil, robed and wearing the horns of Satan at the Black Mass, and sacrificing cocks and beasts and even little children to that Evil One whom he impersonated, had escaped. Though taken and tortured and condemned with his dreadful flock, he had, by his infernal enchantments, filled the prison with phantom flames and fled whilst the gaolers fought them, forgetful of all else.

The captain, being asked why he had then proceeded with his passenger, said that he had not meant to; he had gone below to question him, but when he met his passenger's eyes a strange confusion came over him: he thought what a fool he should look if he gave up the wrong man. More dreadfully, of the suspicion that might come upon himself, an Englishman and held a heretic, in this Papist country, should his passenger prove to be that dreaded warlock. And it may be, also, that the golden

glitter of the passage-money blinded him. At all events, he said nothing; he weighed anchor and set sail, as quick as might be, from those shores of France.

He had sailed again from Boston ere those words of his came to Harperstown. Yet having come, they grew and multiplied like corn in a field. And at last the man Joseph de Quincy was summoned before the magistrates and elders to give answer to the gossip concerning him. He faced them without fear. All that had been told them by himself and others was true, he said, save that the crimes to which he had confessed had been lies wrung from him under the torture. He was indeed a Huguenot and a leech, and his papist neighbours, being wrought to frenzy by fear of that witchcraft which naturally flourished in their ungodly midst, had taken the skill which God in His goodness had vouchsafed him and the cures he had been permitted to effect, for works of the Devil.

And on the rack he had confessed, thus, in his weakness, perjuring himself and imperilling the salvation of his immortal soul to save his mortal body. But in spite of this fall from grace God had vouchsafed him mercy in his sin: on the very night before the day set for his burning fire, whether miraculous or otherwise, had delivered him from prison. And now he sought opportunity to atone his sins by a life of service in a new and godlier land.

He spoke with the tongues of men and angels; his voice was golden and his words were good. There was not an eye that was not wet for his sufferings, or else burning with ire against the papist wickedness. A woman screamed and sobbed and cried out that she beheld a halo about his head. (And mayhap there may have been one, but if so it was of the flames of hell.) All united in a prayer of thanksgiving for

his deliverance, the while he knelt with upraised arms and rapt eyes that it seemed must look indeed on God.

His honor was greater than ever after that. Many held him a martyr, and indeed he walked somewhat lame and stiffly from the rack, to his life's end. He did more cures. So, for awhile, he did all good and seemingly no harm.

Then it fortuned that Elizabeth Harper, daughter of that wealthy and godly elder from whom the town now takes its name, sickened of a strange malady. De Quincy tended her. It was told later by her mother's gossips that Mistress Harper said that once she heard the French leech's voice flowing on and on, softly as the waters of a brook, in her daughter's chamber, and found him holding the girl's hands and staring deep into her eyes that, even on days when she knew no other, would seem fixed unwaveringly, fast as steel to a magnet, upon his face.

But the maid recovered, and thereafter held de Quincy as her saviour. Indeed, she affectioned him strangely and violently, with a passion which should be reserved for God. He made suit for her hand. Her parents liked not the match over-much, but the maid languished and sickened again, and, since she was their one living child, and they feared she might die as her brothers and sisters had done, in the end they yielded, though already a few were beginning to whisper that neither illnesses nor love were natural, but enchantments wrought by de Quincy.

The year after that marriage fever swept Harperstown, and though Joseph de Quincy healed many, the parents of his wife died. With part of their wealth he built a house upon an island near the shore, and removed thither with his wife and infant daughter, though many thought it a singularly isolated residence for a leech.

There they lived, and Elizabeth de Quincy was seen less and less among her neighbours. After her son's birth some of her old illness came back upon her. A sister of her mother's, being rowed across to the island as it chanced, during the husband's absence (though many thought that the goodwife, being inquisitive by nature, watched and picked a time when she knew he would be from home), found her weeping bitterly; and, when pressed, the young wife said that she was tormented by evil dreams. Once she had dreamed that she woke in the night and, going to the window, saw her husband dancing naked with the maidservants by the shore, all their bodies glittering in the moonlight, and that they sacrificed a black cock there and did other rites such as it shamed her to tell of—though this was veriest phantasy, because Joseph was such a godly man and also so lamed that he could never have danced, and in the morning he had berated her roundly for her evil-mindedness and lewd fancies, but the black cock had been gone from the barnyard.

Also another time she had wakened in dead of night, thinking that something touched her, and when she looked she saw that a black scaly tail, tufted with flame at the end, like a fiend's, had switched across her and lay there burning the covers. And when she turned shrieking, to see what manner of thing lay beside her in the bed, she was at first reassured by sight of her husband's face, then saw, to her horror, that horns had risen, black and pointed, from his forehead. After that she screamed again and remembered nothing until Joseph was shaking her awake, and there were neither horns nor tail to be seen. Nor were the bedclothes scorched.

They were dreams, distempers of the mind: they came upon her always, she said, after some stupidness of hers had angered Joseph. She spoke pitifully, defending the husband, yet the aunt saw that she feared him.

She implored her aunt to pray for her, that she might be delivered from these night-terrors and hideous and unreasonable phantasies that made her life a torment. Then, of a sudden, a dish that stood on a table near them fell to the floor with a great clatter; and Elizabeth sprang up, her eyes wild with terror, shrieking: “He is coming! He is angry because he knows that I have been telling you! He is angry!” And she began to weep like a child in mortal terror.

But when the two women ran to the window there was no sign of anyone, nor of any new boat at the island’s shore. Elizabeth said, “Perhaps he is not here then. Perhaps this was not one of the things he makes fall; it did not strike me when it fell. It would have if he had been angry.”

Then, before her aunt could question her, she turned and drew her towards the door.

“Go now, for if he comes and finds you here he will ask me what we have been talking about, and he does not like me to tell all these things. Naturally, what husband would?” And she laughed a little; it was more pitiful, the aunt said later, than her cries.

“Must you tell him what we have said?” she says that she asked.

“ ’Tis no matter. When he looks at me, my tongue is not mine, but his. It answers; it betrays my thought to him.”

But on the way down to the beach she seemed to forget all that had happened, and laughed a little and spoke as she had in her girlish days. When her aunt asked her of the

meaning of the fallen dish she looked puzzled and troubled and said, “I am become so awkward. I drop so many things. Only last week I scalded myself with boiling soup—’twas not flavoured to Joseph’s liking. Yet I had barely touched the dish when it fell.”

“You had not touched this dish at all, Elizabeth,” said her aunt. “You were not within three paces of it.”

And the young woman looked at her in veritable surprise and said, “I was not? That is strange. Joseph says ’tis part of my illness that I so often drop and break things.”

“Had you forgotten that you did not break this?”

“Yes. I forget so many things. Like the black cock—Joseph says we had killed and eaten it the week before I had my dream, and when he fixed his eyes on me and told me so, I remembered it; yet I had not. I can still remember, too, seeing that black cock pecking up the grain the night before I dreamed.” And she looked puzzled and wondering, like a child.

That conversation has been preserved to posterity. It was told and told again by the goodwife many times, but whether Elizabeth de Quincy ever told it to any is not known, because after that day she sickened and took to her bed, and never again knew any that came near her during the year longer that she lived. And it is said, also, that a farm-boy saw Joseph de Quincy row to his home that day, and turn when he saw his kinswoman’s boat, and land on the other side of the island, where he might have crept up to the house unseen.

But he could not have touched the dish that stood upon his table unless he had had the power of entering invisible to the women.

Such is the record of the life and deeds of Joseph de Quincy, as sworn to by his own kin and neighbours at the trial of his daughter Sarai for witchcraft in Salem in the year of the great Witch-Hunt or Delusion, in 1692, two years after his death. She was convicted and hanged, her own husband, a merchant of Salem, being among her accusers. Many of the usual tales were told of her: of women who had quarrelled with her and sickened and died, of men who showed bruises on their backs where she had transformed them into horseshape and ridden them through the air in the night.

But her maidservants testified that she had also, at divers times, displayed to them strange beasts, with horrible green eyes and slavering fangs, that sprang at them and vanished in the springing, and had told the wretched girls that these would devour them if they betrayed her in aught. Also, that they had known her to sacrifice black lambs and cocks to the Evil One in a dark room where they dared not follow to see what came in answer to her call.

And this woman, knowing that hope of life was past, confessed with unholy pride and glee that she had done all these things and more, after the teaching of her father, and would do yet more, and twelve times worse, if she were allowed to live.

Gaylord Carew laid the magazine down. He had not received Barret until after his regular office-hours, and the brightness was fading from the sky; evening was coming on. The hum of the traffic in Forty-fifth Street came up to them faintly from far below, storeys below, a dulled, unhuman whisper in the silence.

“They have a fondness for family names,” he mused, “and they are fascinated by family traditions, are they not? It seems to be rather a strong strain of blood. Inbred?”

The lawyer looked at him, rather startled.

“I suppose you might say so, but I never thought of it that way. There are only a few families in Harpersville sufficiently eminent to marry into the Quincys. They have done so for over two hundred years. That may be,” he spoke delicately, again with that odd air of secrecy and reservation, “why the male line has died out so rapidly during the last two generations. Elizabeth Stone’s father was the last. He contracted consumption, went West and married a Western girl, and seemed to have recovered until he tried to come back East. As in so many cases, it didn’t work; he died. His wife died too, the next month, at the birth of a second child—a still-born son. Miss Sarai was fit to be tied.”

“And considered it an insult for the little girl to be alive when her brother was dead?” Carew thought that the grim old woman herself must have been Chinese in her attitude toward daughters; indifferent as the ancestral French to dark blood as long as it flowed in the sacred veins of a Quincy. Had it been some psychic affinity, some cry of the old wizard’s blood that had made Captain Pegleg buy his yellow light-o’-love in Pekin—the queer golden woman with her heritage from Shamanistic sorceries and the mysterious monasteries on the Roof of the World? What part had that heritage played in the re-invigorated blood of these last two men who were Quincy, bred and bone?

His thoughts turned from the little girl, who had certainly once been very miserable in Witch House, to the other,

hers, who was perhaps as miserable there now, though in a different way.

He looked at Barret.

“I’m afraid it might mean a several weeks’ stay in Witch House if I am to study this case and treat it properly. Is your client prepared for that?”

“Elizabeth?” The old lawyer’s face showed his relief. “It is what she wants. She says you can’t find out anything to understand it any other way. But I didn’t suppose you would consent. Less than ever after reading that fairy tale of Joseph’s.”

“It’s not a fairy tale in any sense of the word. Nor from any viewpoint broad enough to be genuinely rational. I should imagine that it all happened very much as it is told here. Even to the breaking of the dish. Breakage is a poltergeist trick; there are numerous cases on record, though science hasn’t yet discovered the physical principle behind them.”

“You don’t mean you take that kind of thing seriously?” Barret’s old blue eyes looked badgered and bewildered, suddenly a little uneasy.

“The murmurous voice, the staring into the unfortunate girl’s eyes—it is all very obvious hypnotism. I have used hypnotism in treating certain cases, and so have plenty of other doctors, though I prefer,” he smiled slightly “to teach my patients to de-hypnotize themselves—dissolve their illusions by their own strength. Why shouldn’t a master-mesmerist trade on his talents like any other fortune-hunter? Though I think Joseph de Quincy was far more than that; his wife’s fortune was, with him, probably the means to an end. He evidently took his office, his Godhead in the Coven, if you can call it that, seriously. Both his wife’s

stories and the teaching he gave his daughter indicate that."

"You mean he made her see those visions? They weren't just a dying woman's delirium?"

"Partly. I imagine that that scene on the beach was real, except that, being lame, he did not dance. But her powers of visualization would have been well-developed after his unscrupulous use of them. Another time, you notice, he appeared to her horned and tailed, the Devil of the Coven, in the very shape that she must have come to believe his true one. Her own imagination, or a trick of his to torment her? Since hypnotism was unknown then, except to his ilk, he *was* a wizard according to Glanvil's definition: 'One who can do or seem to do strange things beyond the known power of art or ordinary nature!' "

"Then you do think it was partly her own imagination?" Something in Barret's voice clung to the idea tightly.

"Very probably. He was destroying her brain; it would inevitably have betrayed her at times. But I don't think it often needed to. He *was* a masterhand. Some points in that story indicated that he could transmit his commands to her brain by telepathy—an unusual power. Rasputin is said to have had it, but it's not among the recognized and accepted powers of hypnotism. The man who could command it—and whose mind was of a type that could deliberately invoke Incarnate Evil—is not a good antagonist. Alive or dead."

He had spoken half to himself, sombrely. The old lawyer did not think that he had betrayed his own feelings by starting, yet suddenly Gaylord Carew looked up, smiling whimsically in reassurance.

"Don't be frightened. I'm not a spiritualist; I don't believe in ghosts—your kind of ghost. Who knows the real

definition of the word? I'll do my best to lay, not encourage, whatever is troubling Witch House."

The old man did not answer clearly; he stirred restlessly. For him the word had but one definition; one he did not believe in, but would have preferred not to remember. His was not a mystic temperament. He preferred to go to church on Sundays, and live honestly, and let the Hereafter wait until he came to it. Nonsense, extremely unpleasant nonsense, to think of its intruding on the here and now.

Yet he remembered uneasily and saw, clearly as a picture, Miss Sarai sitting in her purple dress, with the big purple amethyst rings gleaming on her fingers as they did in the portrait, her skinny, claw-like hands outstretched over the fire. That had been the last time he had ever seen her, the last fortnight before her death, and she had insisted on rising to receive him, though they had both known that she would never leave her room again.

She had greeted him with a cackling laugh.

"I'm chilly, Barret—cold—and I'll soon be colder. No fire can warm me now; I can't seem to get near enough. But I'm going where there's some that will, if the preachers have been right. Old howling Cotton Mather and his ilk—not these washed-out, sugar-coating modern nincompoops that wouldn't know the Devil if they met him on the street."

He had ignored that. It had often seemed best to ignore what Miss Sarai said. He had tried to persuade her to send for Elizabeth, at least to notify the young widow that her name had been restored to her aunt's will.

But Miss Sarai had only laughed.

"It will be good for Elizabeth to be afraid a while. She was always stubborn, and as soon as she was no longer a child to be whipped and locked up she got her own way—

she took it. Now again she's where she can't help herself." She chuckled. "I like to think of her that way. I like making her feel that way as long as possible. Let her starve a little while. Besides, I don't want her at my deathbed, smirking over my forgiveness."

The cool gleeful malice of it, so exquisitely entertained by suffering, the hag-hideousness of her mind and body, shocked him. He felt as if he were looking at a thing outside the pale of humanity, an alien, monstrous thing, sitting there by the fire, rubbing its hands. Sarai the Contentious; in the air about her there had been some grim, fiery activity that bore out the Biblical meaning of her name; she was like the seat of ancient storms, half-conscious depositary of the lightning and its blasting fires.

He asked bluntly, shocked out of his professional diplomacy, "But why did you forgive her at all, then?"

Miss Sarai answered matter-of-factly: "I have not forgiven her. She is a Quincy; Quincys belong at Witch House. She ran away from it and now she will have to run back to it. The return of the Prodigal. But I decline to oblige you, my dear Barret, by serving up the fatted calf with my own hands. I'm *dragging* her back, not *taking* her back.

"Still," she chuckled again, a mocking, eldritch cackle, and stared into the fire that woke red gleams in the amethysts on her hands, "I have been hostess at Witch House a long time; I may find it hard to forget my duties. You may tell my niece, when she comes, that I shall be waiting for her. And for the child."

Now Barret had an illogical feeling, as he looked up and found the quiet, intent eyes of the doctor upon him, that the fantastic memory and fear he had not told were being weighed and measured quite as much as the words his lips had spoken—as though his thought had been guided and led on, into revelations, his brain probed, as with some subtle lancet, for the truth.

Gaylord Carew went to the open window and stood beside it when the lawyer had gone. Far below him, the bottom of a deep, narrow canyon, lay the street where people seemed to scurry ant-like, dark little mechanical dolls. Above and before him the sky was a darkening blue; the stars would soon begin to come out. He drew a deep breath and thought of the Himalayas, the white, pure peaks, with their clean cold vastness, at the top of the world.

He felt the need of cleanness; he had been conscious of much uncleanness during his talk with Barret. Something had followed the little old man into the room like a vapor, a stream of murky, fiery images like the odor of burning. And soon he himself must step into the very heart of that uncleanness, and keep his own rate of vibration steady, undisturbed, among its dark winds, a lamp to burn unwaveringly and give off sane light in blackness.

He was not afraid. He was aware of a call, and would have answered it, even without the financial terms Barret had insisted on defining to such a nicety. But he wondered in what form he would find his antagonist. It would have many faces. Old Joseph de Quincy’s, dead so long ago; Miss Sarai’s, the lately-dead; and how many more? All who had

contributed of their own strength to the evil of Witch House, and passed on, leaving it behind them, darkly storing the ancient walls.

Was that half-conscious, stored evil working only of its own nature now, as old wine works in the bottle, or was it fighting its campaign under more conscious guidance? With other help?

For that there was evil, positive, undiluted evil, in Witch House, he did not doubt. His trained faculties had seen enough in these vaporous pictures eddying round Barret to assure him of that. There are plague-spots for the soul as well as for the body, breeding-grounds of spiritual infections, and this old house, so sinister in its building, might be such an one.

He knew that. He knew many things which would have caused Barret to shrink from him as one both incredibly foolish and dangerously unwholesome: Barret, who refused to tell even himself what he knew.

Carew's life had not been a usual one. Both his parents had been doctors before him—scientists and atheists. Margaret Gaylord had been a rebel against tradition all her life; when she had made medicine her profession in a day that despised women-doctors; when she had embraced atheism along with her brilliant, iconoclastic surgeon-husband, Gerard Carew. And found the former a fair exchange for horror of that hell her grandfather had preached of whenever 'the Spirit moved him', degrading the quiet, shining fineness of the old Quaker phrase by his orgiastic dilation upon the agonies of the damned. Venting too, had he known it, the less religious than dramatic fervor of an imagination starved for drama, gayety, excitement, all the things he banned.

The child Margaret had never been moved to a desire for righteous living by those tones throbbing with vicarious anguish, only to furious horror of the God who was so relentless a torturer. He could not be good; in her was a sturdy independence of spirit that refused to bow to tyrants on earth or in heaven. Grown, she rejected as claptrap all such melodramatic invisible extensions of time; agreed with her husband that there was only the present.

And for a while the ‘now’ had splendidly sufficed her; the Carews had been young and strong and handsome, alike in tastes and sympathies and purpose; had lived with a rich fullness that seemed to justify birth and death.

Until a car had struck the noted surgeon down three feet from the safety of the curb; and Margaret Carew had had to face the mystery of how rubber-shod wheels could in two minutes snuff out so much brilliance and vitality; the hideous contradiction of a universe that could so intricately evolve, and in a moment so senselessly and accidentally smash, Gerard. Nothing else in all Nature was wasted; not even the water that fell from a glass to the ground. Yet only his flesh would be used again, not the thing that had guided it, the subtle fire, the strange individual essence that had made him himself and not another, the man she had loved. That too had been real, and it was utterly gone. She knew medical names enough, and uselessly, for her own stubborn irrational inability to believe it. She was the first to doubt her own sanity.

A weaker woman would have reverted to her childhood orthodoxy; but she had no superstitious fears of judgment. Her moral sense denied a God who would have damned Gerard Carew. If He existed, He would appreciate honesty, kindliness, sincere and unselfish work to relieve human

suffering; His infinite dignity would be too great to be disturbed by finite human inability to appreciate Him.

There were no half-measures for her; she could not accept one part of her forebears' Bible and reject another. Spiritualism offered her nothing either; she would not insult Gerard by imagining him trying to communicate with her through the crude vulgarity of table-tipping.

If there was a God, He was not a tyrant nor served by dancing furniture. She took another road to seek Him—and her man. She and Gerard had heard that Eastern philosophers taught a principle of spiritual evolution; as applied to anything so ephemeral as the individual, not merely to the cycle of civilizations, it had always seemed to them fantastic and visionary. Now, however, she would examine it on its own ground—not second-hand, through the lips or writings of Western pupils, or haphazardly, through the bungling of translators.

And she did examine it, throughout the length and breadth of India, with the same dispassionate, unprejudiced curiosity with which she might have examined atoms under a microscope. In the darkness of labyrinthine temples where adoring worshippers lapped fetid water fouled with the blood of sacrificial goats; among naked ascetics whose holiness boiled down to a masochistic fanaticism, among their less sincere and more practical brethren—for the East has its fakers as well as its fakirs—in the face of the cold or more than slightly derisive prejudices of Western officials and missionaries offended by the sight of a white woman taking native superstitions seriously. She had been prepared to accept or to reject—but not until she had sifted the last grain of sand for its mysterious alloy of falsehood or truth.

In Malabar, the mysterious, ancient stronghold of magic young Gaylord Carew had thrilled, at thirteen, to the sight of a man raising a stool five inches from the floor without touching it—might have thrilled too much if Margaret's cool brain had not steadied him. Here at last was proof that there were trained manipulators of physical laws unknown to Western science; but here also was only a sort of super-table-tipping, superior in its lack of claim to connection with the dead, but irrelevant to her purpose.

In the East as in the West the doors of true knowledge are few and far between, nor do they open to the curious or the prejudiced knocker; but Margaret Carew had knocked with stubborn patience, would knock further. The veils of glamor with its traps and snares had not caught her, nor the quagmires of stench and corruption terrified her.

And in the end one of those doors opened to her. She achieved at long last her quest, not that communication with the dead which she had always rejected as too obvious a drug and a snare, but inner assurance of her eternity and his.

On that personal desire rested; the wheel turned; another phase of the Odyssey began. Margaret Carew began to help more than to seek help. She and her son had stayed and studied in the upper Himalayas; when they came down again to the lower hills they still studied, but Margaret Carew practised. The natives paid her in firewood and food-stuffs, when at all.

But when her son was twenty-one she had insisted that he leave her for Paris and Vienna. "My place is here for the rest of the years that I have this time; I do good here, and it is my school-room. I could have found another; wisdom isn't a matter of geography—but the East was the obvious

symbol. And we are pupils where we are meant to be. But your work is back in that world from which we came; I can do this alone. And I shall always have you, but I shall not need your presence any more."

And he had known that that was neither coldness nor mysticism but only truth. She did not order nor he obey; their relations had long been cleansed of authority or dependence: she merely voiced what they both knew should be.

"You would never be willing; you still have the white man's prejudice against leaving a woman alone in these mountains among savages; and *I* suppose in a way I'm proud you have it—but it's not sense in this case, it's nonsense, my dear. I can take care of myself, as you can—and I've other things to fall back on."

She gave her hand as well as her lips at parting. Her dark eyes, deep and grave, studied him during that handclasp. "You will be lonely; I'm sorry for that. It will be hard for you to marry; I've spoilt you for other women. But you will be bigger, and safer, than Gerard and I ever were. You'll do subtler work than ours; setting broken minds as well as broken bones. You may be the first Western scientist to understand how deep consciousness goes—the relation between a man's nerves and his soul. Perhaps that was why all this had to be."

And she had been right: he was lonely; he had never married because he had never found a woman to match her: the sword-keen, sexless fineness of her mind, the width and height of her vision and understanding, her calm, straight-dealing lack of hypocrisy—what had it ever mattered to her that people thought her either a superstitious crank or a dangerous heretic? And he knew

that, ironically enough, his own attitude towards her had been a subject of doubt and discussion until she was forgotten; he had never talked of either her views or his own; in the East he had learned not to squander knowledge, to keep his own doors closed to all but intelligent knockers.

He was thirty-six now; fourteen years ago when he was in Vienna she had died in her cave-home under the eternal snows: died, he knew, as serenely as she had lived. She had expected that death, and to her it had been only the opening of another door.

From his apartment that night he made several telephone calls; he had a wide and varied acquaintance in the professional and intellectual circles of the city; and he desired a more complete knowledge of his undertaking: he had not been able to question Barret about the characters of his clients.

He found one man, a writer of the odd and macabre, who knew one of Miss Sarai Quincy's heirs: Quincy Lee.

"Odd sort of fellow. Looks like a Russian Tartar—he brags that his grandmother was the niece of a Mongol Incarnate God, and likes to fancy himself psychic. Used to stage hashish parties in Greenwich Village to try to open the way into other realms—dimensions or psychic planes adjoining ours, but invisible. He brought home a Russian wife from his last trip to Paris two years ago—said to be the daughter of one of Rasputin's coterie of female devotees. He's supposed to have admitted that he married her because he thought she'd be a likely subject for hypnotic experiments —perfect plasticity.

“Yes. I did hear once of his having a brother; he went into a fury because his aunt let his brother take the old family name. Said it was an effort to get an advantage over him—the vibrations of the two names, Whatever-it-was Quincy, would mean doubled power. Only impressive thing about Quin himself is that he makes you feel, right off, that he’s rotten through and through.”

Gaylord Carew hung up the receiver with a grimace of distaste. So this decadent dabbler in the Black Arts, this would-be sorcerer and very possible sadist, was what Joseph de Quincy’s line had fallen to.

II

Harperstown had aged like a handsome woman, an overworked, disappointed woman, who breaks under the lean, piling years. The town had flowered with the East India trade, had faded with it: hung now like a withered flower upon a broken stalk. There was no traffic now in the street where the old merchant princes had built their houses, their palatial houses with the queer, cloudy, “purple” glass windows, and the two front doorways. Those white doors, like their houses, needed repainting now; there were broken palings in the fences; weeds sullenly invaded lawns that had once been emerald-smooth.

Gaylord Carew thought that to the townsfolk the Quincys’ continued prosperity must seem like witchcraft. Something had sucked the town dry, but they had gone on. Out of the East India trade in time, into something else in time.

Their island formed one side of the old harbor; scarcely five hundred feet of water separated it from the mainland, yet that separation was somehow significant, irrevocable. Witch House loomed over the town sentinel-wise: a quaint stone structure, low and rambling, like a Breton farmhouse, indistinct in the grey drizzle and the shrouding mists.

The heavy February rain had not stopped since the day before, and might not stop for three days more. He had driven straight into its wet confusing greyness a hundred

miles beyond New York; the hissing dimness had shrouded his car all the rest of the long way up the granite coast.

He had started two days before the date set for his arrival; he had wanted to take Witch House by surprise, before it should be ready for him, with that painted, artificial face a house always puts on for expected guests. The sketchy pictures in Barret's mind might have been colored by secret, ashamed suspicion; but there must be a natural face it wore crouched over its own fireside, living its own normal, or abnormal, life.

He took a room for the night at a comfortable weatherbeaten white house facing the island; there was a barn where he could leave his car. The people of the house, an elderly man and his wife, probably had financial reasons for opening their doors to tourists. Other doors opened to him gladly because he was Margaret Gaylord's son. Mrs. Harris had been an Alva Robbins whose cousin had gone to school with Margaret Carew.

"Maybe you've heard your mother mention Ella Robbins? They were real thick once. Ellie thought the world and all of her. But they sort of lost touch, like people will."

Shadows of relationships, shadows of old friendships. The loyalties of people who live in small places, whose quiet lives have much room for memory. Gaylord Carew was friendly; he was a man to respect those ancient kindlinesses. Under his praise of her biscuits and watermelon preserves his hostess purred.

"Yes; Eve thought sometimes I might have made money off them if there'd been summer folks like come to some of the towns on the coast. But Miss Sarai didn't like summer people, and Miss Sarai Quincy ran this township for forty years. Said she wouldn't have a pack of strangers messing

around our cobbled streets and old houses and saying ‘How dear! How quaint!’ It was her town, and the town of her fathers before her, and she wasn’t going to have it turned into any museum exhibit.”

“So she killed it? How did she manage this exclusion?” There was a gleam of interest in Carew’s eyes.

The woman considered, her brows a little knit.

“One way and another. She said she’d take the factory away if the place got to being a summer resort, and the factory is the town’s mainstay. And if she’d drawn out all her money at once she’d have broken the bank, and she’s mean enough for that.” Carew noticed the present tense: the persistent habit of thought. “Besides, they all ate out of her hand at the mayor’s office; she could do about what she liked.”

“Still, she could hardly have forbidden people to rent out their own rooms?”

“A few did. The Parkers did; they were hard up, and they lost their house finally. I don’t remember just how it all happened—it just didn’t happen, I guess; there quit being talk of summer people. And it *is* a fact; people don’t usually have much luck when they go against the Quincys; not even that poor boy that ran off with her niece. Miss Sarai’s dead, and his wife is going to be rich after all; but it came too late for him.”

“You knew Hugh Stone then? I’ve heard of that affair.”

“Knew him! He boarded here two years—the pleasantest, sunniest-tempered young fellow I ever saw. A big blond boy with blue eyes as bright and clear as a baby’s. You’d never have dreamed he’d go that way. You have his room now, Doctor—the big one under the eaves. He was going to go into the bank with his uncle; it was all fixed. But when he

ran away with Elizabeth Ann, Miss Sarai told old Mr. Stone she'd take her account out of the bank if he let his nephew work there any longer. That was why they had to go to the city—the two young folks."

Carew's dark eyes pondered, gravely.

"Romeo and Juliet, with half of the traditional consequences? But there may have been compensations; I suppose they were very much in love."

" 'Very much in love?' " The woman's voice was slow, seemed to examine each of the words as it let them go. "I suppose you might say they were. He was. But she was a queer one, like all the Quincys."

Her husband looked up from his food with a touch of

warning. "You hadn't ought to say that, Alvy. She loved the boy right enough. What else do you think she ran away with him for? Miss Sarai was a Tartar, but no girl would have run away just for that—not and lost all she stood to loose."

"That's as may be, John Harris!" There was a snap in his wife's voice; she did not like the suggestion that she did not know when to hold her tongue. More, Gaylord Carew felt in her mind a raying finger of that strangeness and suspicion that separated the Quincys from their kind, even when they crossed their strip of water for the shore. Some old recollection was stirred, some old distrust.

"I don't know what goes on inside a Quincy's head—it would be beyond me to make out! But you know well enough she acted mighty queer that evening when we found her upstairs here with him; she didn't act like a girl in love: more like one that's scared to death!"

Carew was silent and Harris answered stubbornly: "You would've been, too, Alvy, if you'd been running away from

Sarai Quincy."

"Not like that, John. She wasn't a child; and she acted like one—one that's been grabbed by something in the dark and just managed, somehow, to get away!

"And you know he hadn't seen her to talk to all that summer, either. He'd set out on the porch evenings, by the hour, and watch the shore of the island—for her to come along it, I suppose now, though I never guessed it then. It was as if she'd fair bewitched him. But there wasn't any courting; he couldn't have got a boat without our knowing it, and if he'd swum across I'd have seen his wet clothes later. You know how close Miss Sarai kept her; they can't ever have been alone together more than two or three times before that night. It was a mighty queer business, all around!"

"It has the sound of it," Carew murmured, and her husband, glancing nervously into the shadows behind her, grunted: "Well, you've told so much you can't do anything but go on and finish it up now."

Mrs. Harris needed no encouragement. Old excitement stirred her.

"It was an evening in August. It was stifling hot that year, and I'd been canning all day. I thought I'd lie down a minute before I did the dishes, and I must have dozed off. It was Hugh's voice, crying out sort of sharp and sudden, that woke me. But when I got up and asked what was the matter, nobody answered. He wasn't there. I went to the stairs—it was getting dusk, and they were dark. And there were tracks there, step after step, all muddy, leading from the door—leading up until they got lost in the dark of the stairs. I felt funny, but I went up, too.

“Hugh was in the hall, and Elizabeth Quincy, with her dress and hair all wet, was hanging on to him with her eyes black and scared as if there’d been wolves behind her. She was saying over and over, in a kind of wild whisper: ‘I tell you, Hugh, I’ll go anywhere with you, do anything you want, I’ll marry you or anything else—if you’ll only take me away from here. So far away nobody can find me! Anything —anything at all!’

“He was looking sort of dazed, and watching the stairs, but he held on to her even when I came up. She cried out then and hung onto him tighter. ‘Don’t let her stop us, Hugh! No one must stop us—no one! I’ve got to get away!’

“I said, ‘You look as if you’d already got away from something. What’s happened?’ She was sopping wet—her hair was half down and dripping—and she must have been soaked to the skin. But she didn’t answer; she only kept on hanging onto him and saying: ‘Will you take me, Hugh? Will you?’ Until his eyes lit up and he kissed her sort of wild-like and said, ‘Of course, Elizabeth.’ But she sort of shivered then; you could see it go all over her face when he pulled her to him.

“Afterwards we got her downstairs and gave her some elderberry wine—that was when you came in, John. When I asked her if anything was wrong she said no, she’d waded ashore because she hadn’t known how to land the boat, Miss Sarai had never let her take it out alone. But she must have been pretty desperate to do that; she was all over mud.

“I tried to get them to stop and think things over—I knew what a risky thing they were about to do, between Hugh’s prospects and Miss Sarai’s temper. But I couldn’t make him listen. Every time I’d begin she’d get hysterical again, and

say ‘Now, Hugh—*now!* It will be too late tomorrow.’ And then when she saw he couldn’t hold out against her, that she had him, she’d be cool as a cucumber again, playing the fine lady, pretending. Telling me that she and Hugh had been planning this for a long time—that it wasn’t a hasty, unconsidered step. But you could tell by his face he’d never heard of it before, any more than a babe unborn.

“He got a car from the local garage, and they drove off that night. They were married when they came back next afternoon. Miss Sarai had already been to the bank by then. There was nothing for them to do but go on to the city; that was what *she* wanted anyway. Hugh sent us cards for a year or so after that, a letter when the baby came. He sounded real happy then; the first ones, I thought, sounded like he was whistling in the dark.”

Harris said, “You’re leaving out the thing that probably did scare her, Alvy. Joseph and Quincy are supposed to have fought like wildcats that night.”

“Nobody knows whether they fought before or because she left. And fist-fighting wouldn’t scare a woman that much,” Mrs. Harris said simply. “Not like that.”

There was a silence. Gaylord Carew’s voice broke in like a golden pebble falling into dark waters.

“The baby, as you call her, is my business here. I’m on my way to examine her at Witch House; she suffers from some kind of nervous ailment. I’m sorry—I apologize for listening. I shouldn’t have been so unethical if I hadn’t hoped for some light on my patient’s background.”

“Light?” Harris said grimly. “You’re more likely to find dark.”

Later that night Carew ascended those stairs up which Elizabeth Ann Quincy had once fled to her lover. He could

almost hear them beside him in the dark, those small mired shoes, flying; flying as if there had been wolves behind her, wolves out of some ancient elemental darkness.

The rain sang a dismal little song under the eaves; the island kept its secret, invisible in the blackness and the mist. He had a feeling, as he peered towards it, that another man at this window had done this hundreds of times before him, done it with heartsick, burning eagerness. A man who had come to room here, as he had, because the house was within sight of Witch House? A lover, lying on this bed fevered and entranced, night after night, until that unbelievable step upon the stair came to give him all or nothing that he wished for? A woman who wanted him as he wanted her—or only a refuge?

All—or nothing?

Next afternoon the rain stopped. The sky stayed dark and overcast, thick, swollen clouds pregnant with menace pressing down, closely, lid-like, upon the earth. But no drop fell; the waters in the sky waited, motionless in their high banks of mist, unretreating.

Carew wandered through those streets of premature twilight; he talked with fishermen at the quays, with druggists and grocers, but he did not question them. He came and went quietly: a singularly evocative shadow: receptive, delicately tuned as some fine radio, and as empty, for the time, of all deduction, all emotion. Now he felt and listened; later he would assemble and examine.

He wanted atmosphere, the subtle *feel* of atmosphere: not facts, but the aura of their causes; and sometimes he found both. The Quincys, and the queerness of the Quincys.

Dull grudges against the Quincys; dim distrust of the Quincys. Old wives' tales and new tales of their strangeness and their feuds: of Mr. Quincy, who was like a snarling dog, and Mr. Joseph, who was like a smooth, calm black cat.

"They fought like cat and dog from the time they were little shavers. Now Mr. Joseph would live peaceable and quiet; but Mr. Quincy won't—he's one for stirring things up. There've always been a lot of queer fish in that family. But he's a danged sight the queerest."

Towards evening Carew engaged a boat and brought his belongings to it from the Harris's; his car he left in a public garage. The boat had to round the island; Witch House stood on the eastern shore, facing the open sea, the wide grey waters that stretched off, league after undulating league, toward the green, unseeable shores of Spain and Portugal, and the Continent that Joseph de Quincy had fled from long ago.

Somewhere behind the cloud-lid the sun was setting; a dull red glow seeped through and touched the mainland; Witch House stood up black against it, peering into the dusk that was descending upon the waters. The purple glass of its windows, more clouded, more opaque than ever, shone balefully in that red reflected light, with a murky luridness, as though within had been the flames of hell.

A servant let Gaylord Carew in, led him to a long low room where a fire hissed in a great fireplace whose tiling was very old—the priceless souvenir of some long-gone voyage. A fair woman in red whose pale, prominent eyes stared vaguely out of a pale face came to welcome him eagerly.

“Dr. Carew? We were surprised; we did not expect you until tomorrow! Elizabeth will be most pleased. I am Mrs. Lee, not Mrs. Stone—Mrs. Quincy Lee.”

He had known it. Even without her accent, the distended pale pupils of the hysteric, the abnormally flexible fingers that coiled clingingly round his own, identified her—the woman whose mother had been among the puppet-victims whom Rasputin could summon from a distance; the woman Quincy Lee had married in order to experiment with her extreme susceptibility to hypnotism. A wave of uncleanness, of feeble, nauseating uncleanness, streamed out from her to him.

“A psychopathic case,” he thought, and asked aloud, “You will tell your cousin that I am here?”

“I’ve sent for her already.” He knew instantly that she had lied: waited to see why, as, with a little shrug of her shoulders, she went on: “She may not be able to come for a little while. It is hard for her to leave her own rooms; the child takes constant watching. If you would like tea or something more bracing—a whisky-and-soda? It should be cold on the sea today.”

“Tea, thank you, if it is not too much trouble.”

“None at all. I always make myself a cup at this hour. I am Russian; the servants here cannot brew it to my liking; they have no comprehension of flavor; they are all good-for-nothing, insolent fools. You have doubtless an educated palate, Dr. Carew—you who have lived in so many countries.”

“You know my record then?”

He was smiling quizzically, but his eyes were keen, and hers could not meet them. She recovered herself; laughed delicately.

“Yes. My husband and his brother made several inquiries about you, Dr. Carew; they wished, naturally, to know that their cousin was not calling in any quack. Elizabeth is hardly balanced upon the subject; you will soon realize that. To undergo this ordeal so soon after the shock of her husband’s death would be too much for any woman. But our precautions were a secret; you will not tell her of them? You understand?”

“Of course.” Carew’s whimsical smile was non-committal. “I’m glad my dossier proved reassuring.”

“Before you leave you will probably wish it had not.” She shrugged again, with a wry grimace. “I do not envy you the curing of your patient, Dr. Carew. Not that it could not be done easily enough—with a whip. But Elizabeth will not see it so; she will believe any superstitious twaddle sooner than that her child could be destructive or untruthful. If Betty-Ann breaks a vase and says she has not done it, it is a Poltergeist phenomenon; if she is caught slashing a portrait with a knife it is because it frightens her so—nothing is ever her fault. I am sorry to tell you this, Dr. Carew, but it would be unfair not to warn you.”

Her wide eyes clung to his, their pale popping blueness anxious and troubled, sanity appealing to sanity. It would have convinced most men: to this one who had dealt with many neurotic women it was additional proof of how carefully she had been coached for her part. They had feared that chivalry might make him take the woman’s side; they had sent another woman to make first appeal upon it—draw him to theirs.

Why? Because Elizabeth Stone, if she grew desperate enough to leave Witch House, would automatically disinherit not only herself but her cousins and must

therefore be kept there? The hints that she was unbalanced, superstitious and insane on the subject of her child, paved a possible way. And it aureoled this woman, clear as her voice: a feeble exultant spite, the delight of the weak, consciously inferior brain in casting aspersions upon the stronger.

He said thoughtfully, “I’ve been given to understand that there is an hysterical mania of some sort—a fear complex. Does it center around this portrait?”

“Elizabeth will tell you that story. It would be unkindness to inflict it on you twice. The portrait *is* ugly—I must admit that though I mean no disrespect—but nothing to so greatly frighten a girl of nine years. It is the portrait of my husband’s late cousin, Miss Sarai Quincy—all three of the children called her aunt. Betty-Ann took an immediate dislike to it. In fairness to my husband I must tell you about the incident of the slashing, Dr. Carew; Elizabeth would tell it differently.”

She paused, and he waited silently. She went on, after a moment, without the hoped-for cue.

“Quincy, my husband, was passing through the hall one morning when he heard something fall in the drawing-room. The child *is* naturally clumsy—not all the breakage is intentional, for she must have wanted quiet then. When Quincy looked in she had drawn a chair up to the mantel and was standing on the mantel itself; she had knocked off one of the bowls, and was slashing the picture, which hangs over it, with a knife.

“That portrait is explicitly named in the terms of Aunt Sarai’s will, and Quincy was frightfully alarmed. He tried to pull her away, but she clung to the picture like a leech and it fell on both of them. Betty-Ann was not hurt but of course

she was screaming when Elizabeth and Joseph and I rushed in, and Quincy was pulling the knife out of her hand. He dared not let her go until he had it, and Elizabeth thought, I suppose, that he meant to punish her—she has the maternal complexes of a tigress where that child is concerned. At any rate, she struck him in the face." She paused a moment, her eyes smouldering. "She was wild with anger at Quincy and me; without Joseph I do not see how we ever could have calmed her. As Elizabeth tells the story now, you would think that it was necessary for her to rescue Betty-Ann from Quincy; that he was about to do her harm: you can see how unfair that is, Dr. Carew." She waited, mutely demanding comment that this time he must give.

"Not a very pleasant situation for anyone concerned." He laughed slightly and dryly.

"It was not, and it is not. Since then we've not dared leave the drawing-room unlocked except when we are using it.—Oh, Quincy!"

He rose to his feet as she did, setting his tea-cup down. Two men were entering through a door at the farther end. Tall men and dark, like Carew himself, but with a subtle difference of pigmentation. Their hair was a little too shiningly black; their features, under the healthy, sun-tanned skin, were less regular: harsher. The one on the left had slightly slanted eyes; and the yellow-haired woman turned to him.

"Dr. Carew, my husband, Mr. Quincy Lee and my brother-in-law, Joseph Quincy. He took the old family name again. Dr. Carew came sooner than we expected."

"I'm glad to know you." Quincy Lee put out a hand. "My cousin will be gladder to see you. The latest governess is

leaving in despair tomorrow. But you'll be as much of a wizard as the man who built this house was supposed to be if you can help us out."

"Perhaps I am. That might not be too difficult." Carew laughed a little and saw a sudden flame, furious and avid, leap into the eyes of the man who had just been deriding superstition. Jealousy, and a sinister, thirsty curiosity.

He looked and saw that the third man had seen it too, and that his dark, narrow eyes were laughing quietly. The two men had entered the room together, but Gaylord Carew read in a flash their tremendous lack of unity. Joseph Quincy watched his brother and his brother's wife with the same cool amusement with which he might have watched two children whose mischievous plotting was sure to be found out.

But nothing else in him was readable. Here was the vivid imagination which at fifteen had shaped that tale of Witch House and its founder; but it was held under a cold curb now. Even to a man who knew the not-so-marvelous Hindu trick of thought-reading, Joseph Quincy was a closed book.

"Dr. Carew has no doubt had his training, of whatever type," he said easily. "But he's never before come up against so tough a proposition as Witch House. You and Zoia are always less than fair to Betty-Ann, Quincy. There were Poltergeist phenomena enough in the house when we two were growing up—breaking objects and disappearing objects that we didn't touch. They subsided a good deal until this child came here: a young person's vitality is the necessary if purely unconscious agent—you'll know that much from Flammarion, Doctor, if you've never read anything less scientific and more well-informed."

“You don’t share your sister-in-law’s conviction that the little girl is incorrigible then?” Carew’s tone was one of grave inquiry.

Joseph Quincy shrugged. The smile on his lean, interesting face—a queerly attractive face—was sardonic.

“I don’t know your definition of incorrigible. She’s a child of Witch House—mad enough and bad enough in other people’s eyes, no doubt. It’s queer blood: we can’t help ourselves. Even doctors acknowledge instances of dual personality: a conventional good child, transplanted to Witch House, might be so shocked at what the ancestral environment awakened in her blood that it would create a sort of split or cleavage in personality: a protective aphasia. As for what she says she sees—who knows?”

“You mean she might set up a defense mechanism—remember only what the self she knew and approved of did? That her terror might be obliged to invent reasons for itself: hallucinations?”

“That is a part of Joseph’s explanation. I’m afraid I have nothing so coherent to offer.”

The cool liquid voice was totally unexpected. Carew saw Zoia Lee start, and for half a second the too-red lips curled back from her teeth like an animal’s. The dark hot look that her husband instantly flashed her whitened her; it was like a spear. Evidently Quincy Lee feared clumsiness or overenthusiasm in his tool. Or was she altogether a tool? Zoia might know that her husband was said to have loved his cousin once.

Yet between the two women before him there would always have been antagonism; they were fashioned for it, as surely as white fire and muddy water.

Elizabeth Quincy Stone stood facing them all, slender and straight as a sword. Her presence pierced the poison; into that room so subtly impregnated with evil she brought the cool wild sweetness of spring—something fresh and clean. Wife and widow and mother, there was yet some still untouched beauty about her: as of an unsurrendered fortress, vigilant and proud.

"I'm sorry I wasn't here to receive you, Dr. Carew. And glad Zoia gave you refreshments"—black eyes touching the tea-cups. "Thank you for keeping him entertained, Zoia; I don't doubt you did your best"—the last words had a shade of tired significance—"but you should have called me."

Zoia said quickly and brightly: "I was glad to help. I explained to him how busy you always are, Elizabeth."

"Thank you. It was Carr who told me—Betty-Ann saw the boat rowing back to the mainland, and I sent for him and asked him if anyone had come." Above the casually smiling lips the dark glance was very straight: she was clearing a servant who had doubtless been forbidden to tell her of Carew's coming.

She crossed to him, then, and gave him a slim vital hand. For a moment the contact seemed to unite them oddly, separate them by a subtle inner distance from the others in the room.

Quincy Lee felt it. He said with a sudden dark abruptness, "We'd better be going. Elizabeth will have several things to tell the doctor. Unless you're privileged to stay, Joseph."

Joseph Quincy smiled saturninely, "No," and Elizabeth protested laughingly, "I don't want to run the rest of you out. We can't talk in my sitting-room; Betty-Ann would hear.

But if you'll give me the key to the drawing-room, Zoia, we could go in there."

The drawing-room too was large and low-ceilinged, seeming to condense its shadows, but square. Carew waited, leaning against the mantel, while a servant built up a fire; he had declined a chair. Elizabeth sat down in an old wingback; she looked up and flashed him a wry, brilliant smile when the man had gone.

"Well, have you already formed any opinions, Dr. Carew? If you have, you needn't be afraid to tell me. I can guess so easily what they are."

"That you are a besotted mother and slightly unbalanced?" His answering smile was whimsical. "That opinion was prepared for me: a judge might adopt it if you attempted to leave Witch House and a counter-attempt was made to prove you of unsound mind."

"I know it. I don't think that I look or act insane," her little smile was wearily sardonic, "but I shouldn't care to try to convince a jury. If we consider melodramatic possibilities, I might even have a good deal of trouble in reaching a jury—the village doctor's word would suffice to put me under lock and key. But it will not come to that. I have Barret and myself."

Looking at her, poised and cool and ironic, he thought that she had herself indeed. She was still under thirty; but she had lived through something more than years. The girlish loveliness of her was a warm soft sheath for the hard metal of the blade within: a courage of royal quality, stubborn and unyielding. What had battered it down to make her flee through the waters a half-crazed thing on that night ten years ago?

He said, smiling a little, “I agree with you; it will not come to that. Mr. Lee’s present attitude does not chord well with the Greenwich Village talk of his own aspirations to psychic powers, either. I will plead guilty to having made some inquiries of my own before I came up here. Your cousin Joseph’s theories are more interesting. A normal child would tire of such an elaborate and complicated imposture—never keep it up so long.”

She answered frankly, level eyes on his, “I know Joseph has more than I have to offer—an intelligible theory. No standard scientific mind could take any stock in any explanation but split personality or her subconscious, of course—or in my word, her mother’s. We’re all Jekyll-and-Hyde combinations; that’s humanity—and Jekyll would be infinitely more comfortable if he did not remember the things Hyde did. Until he began to be afraid of the bogeys he invented to attribute them to.

“But in Betty-Ann’s case the bogeys came first—long before anything happened. And I do know that there is nothing in her—conscious or subconscious,” she threw back her head and faced him, “that could make her hurt either of her pets. As, according to that explanation, she must have. The whole thing, from the beginning, has been fear, stark fear.”

“Was there some one definite particular thing that she was afraid of in this beginning?”

“There most emphatically was. There still is.” She stopped. He saw her lips tighten, for a fleeting second, as her eyes rose to some point in the shadows above him. There was a lighted lamp on the table beside her; in the shining mantle of its light her figure shown with a beauty not quite canny. Not alien to Witch House, at home. But

most of the room was a darkness that stretched about them vast and cavernous.

“Of ‘something?’ ” His voice came quietly out of the shadows.

“No.” Her answer came crisp and clear. “Of someone. A very definite someone. Of my Aunt Sarai.”

He said, “It would be better if you would begin at the beginning and tell me exactly how this thing developed, step by step.”

She considered, propping her firm, pointed chin on slender hands. “It’s rather hard. Let us try to understand each other. I don’t believe in ghostly vengeance: it does seem possible to me that Aunt Sarai left something, some emanation of her hate—her will to hurt—behind her; but I don’t believe that she stayed on herself. A phonograph record can repeat a man’s voice, all the living warmth and feeling and vitality of it, for any number of years after he is dead. And Witch House might be, in some sort, a recording-machine; it has vibrated to Quincys, and only to Quincys, for nearly three hundred years. It has never seen much happiness; I think it never will. And my aunt was a very good hater. Does all this seem irrational to you, Dr. Carew?”

His eyes met hers and held them.

“You did not think it would or you would not have sent for me. Rational and irrational are relative terms at best—not hard and fast. Two hundred years ago a man who foretold that one day men would harness the force that shone in the lightning and have only to press a button to light their homes with it would have seemed as irrational as a man could be. Such a feat would have been colossal beyond any attainments of witches and magicians.

“We’ve harnessed the lightning in this age; we’ve learned that a man’s voice can cross the world on air alone; or live on in a round disk after his body is dust. But our comprehension and our application of the miraculous is still grossly physical. Although we’ve begun to acknowledge telepathy, we still can’t understand the idea of thought and feeling creating or leaving tangible vibrations, definite as the sound of a voice, any more than a New Guinea savage could comprehend the existence of germs in the air about him.”

“He would think of them as devils,” she said slowly.

“Exactly. As our own forefathers attributed phenomena they could not understand to ghosts and devils. There are still primitive peoples who would believe a phonograph record the home of a ghost. We may have as many undiscovered things to learn as they have, only we lack the humility to admit it. Not that I condemn materialists entirely; their distrust of the Unknown is a necessary protection to the world. Such discoveries would be about as safe for mankind at present as playing with matches is for children. Your cousin Quincy—if I may be frank—is an unpleasant petty example of that.”

She considered.

“It’s true. Quincy’s interest in the Unknown does not give it much dignity. It makes one want to run the other way. And yet at the same time laugh. But I imagine it is not always a laughing matter for Zoia, although she is no friend of mine. He *is* able to get hold of one or two matches, Dr. Carew, even though he does not understand, any more than the child would, how they are made.”

She looked up at him questioningly. “For you meant, didn’t you, that knowledge, in itself, is good or bad only

according to the way it's used? Or studied? Superficially, to perform tricks with it, as Quincy would, or as a housewife toasts bread with the harnessed lightning, not really knowing how the forces she sets in motion operate? Or deeply: to find out the cause of which it is an illustration; the principle behind it?"

He nodded. "Such a superficial student might be among the most subtly dangerous criminals who ever lived, and yet have no more understanding of the greatness of the forces he misused than a housewife has of the brain processes behind the discovery of electricity or the invention of her toaster."

"But I would want to know the principle behind it—all the miracle that made it!" She was leaning forward; the white flame of interest in her face startled him. At the moment she was not a mother, she was the sexless seeker, vibrant with a passion vivid as a lover's. For the first time he saw her kinship to Quincy, the heritage of Witch House. The same hunger burned through the alabaster lamp as through the fumes of the cheap and smoky lantern.

And he wondered if that was where her vulnerability had lain—if she had feared herself as well as others when she had fled to the safety of the shore? She might have loved her own spiritual integrity; he doubted if she had loved much else. The man who had seen Margaret Carew's contained and stony grief knew that that widowhood had no counterpart here.

Did the same flame burn behind the saturnine veil of Joseph Quincy's face?

At any rate, it faded swiftly from his cousin's. She remembered—made a tired gesture.

“That is a wild guess of mine—about my aunt, of course. I’m sure of only one thing: that Betty-Ann is suffering frightfully, and not through her own fault. I feel that the house itself is to blame. Do you agree with me that that might be possible?”

“I hope it may be partly the house and partly herself. It’s always safer to look for the more common causes first, and a child’s active, suggestible imagination is not a ‘fault,’ as you put it. But it’s infinitely easier to deal with than something that comes wholly from outside. I’ll put some wood on the fire; you can be thinking where to begin.”

As he fed the fire he saw her eyes wander again to that point in the darkness above his head. There was no fear in the look. Rather, it was the cold hostile measuring of an antagonist, hidden from him by the darkness, but clear enough to her.

He himself was aware of the third occupant of the room. He had felt it ever since he had entered Witch House; it had been in the living-room where Zoia Lee had welcomed him; it had followed him into the drawing-room—or, more probably, it had already been there too. A dark presence, so vast and fluid that its body was the shadows that swarmed thick and black under these old low ceilings. His own antagonist, watchful and waiting; he had expected it. What was ominous was the fact that it waited *consciously,* an actual sentient quality in its lurking vigilance.

He went back and sat down beside Elizabeth Stone, and she deliberately turned her dark eyes upon him, withdrawing them from the darkness.

“It was one of the most peculiar provisions of my aunt’s will that all three of us should eat together and afterwards sit here, for at least an hour or two each evening, in the old

drawing-room where her portrait hung and could look down upon us as she had in life. Rather a sentimental-sounding proviso, unless you had seen us in those years. We don't customarily extend the period beyond the hour."

"Do these provisions apply to all of you, including the child?"

"No, only to adult members of the family. Aunt Sarai was reasonable enough to state explicitly that her ruling did not require the presence of infants, who might be nuisances. Betty-Ann is not technically included. But she came in with me that first night. I noticed that she seemed a little restless, nervous; I thought it was because she felt strange. But presently she pulled at my sleeve and whispered that Aunt Sarai's picture was queer—its eyes seemed to follow her when she moved. She was laughing a little, or trying to. I thought nothing of it then."

"It kept up?"

"Yes. She spoke of it two or three times again that first week. Then it got steadily worse. She wasn't ashamed of the feeling any longer; it obsessed her. She insisted that Aunt Sarai's eyes watched her, turned whenever she did. She couldn't bear to sit facing the portrait, and if she sat with her back towards it she kept continually looking over her shoulder; said she was afraid Aunt Sarai would come down from the portrait and creep up on her from behind. She said: 'I can see her coming—with her hands out to get me—Z *can see her with the back of my head!"*

"I've heard of that before. A sort of reflex picture of imagined objects standing behind you. We don't know just what kind of a screen such pictures are thrown on, what airy material forms them. Writers, painters—all artists who visualize anything use enough of it. I'm not sure how

healthy its extensive use is for them—but it can be pretty poisonous for a high-strung child."

Elizabeth Stone's delicate lips shuddered, set in a compressed line.

"It has been. I tried to stop it. I even tried *making* her look at the picture in broad daylight to show her that it was just painted canvas, not a person, that it couldn't possibly move. But she said it 'came alive' by night."

" 'By night' ? Where did she pick that up? Wouldn't the natural phrase for a child be 'after dark' ?"

"I thought of that." Elizabeth's eyes showed puzzlement for a moment. "I asked her where she got it, but she said she didn't remember. Something she read, perhaps, or the movies.

"But she fidgeted so that I couldn't keep her in the drawingroom in the evenings. The others noticed and made comments. And I thought that if she couldn't conquer her fear she might forget it if she never saw the picture. So I left her in our sitting-room in the evenings—it was summer then, and we still had no governess—but with the dog and the cat and a story-book for company she did well enough."

"The dog and the cat? The tragedies hadn't happened then?"

"No. We'd had the dog since she was five. I got her a St. Bernard puppy then because I think that pets are good for children, especially only children. Not only for companionship, but for character-building."

"I understand. If the child is taught the right attitude toward them, it develops an appreciation for the rights of others—consideration."

She flashed him a quick smile that made her face girlish.

“Yes. And it had worked with Betty. The dog was her oldest friend in the world outside of me. She adored the kitten as much; she loves baby things. But she depended on the St. Bernard as a mother depends on a grown son; he’d been a baby she’d fed and now he was big and splendid, far stronger than she was. I don’t believe she’d ever have been afraid with him about. I kept them both outdoors as much as possible. I was afraid of the atmosphere of this gloomy old house for a child. And she was happy outside, playing with him. Then one day she lost him—found him lying all mangled, at the foot of a cliff.”

“I can imagine what that meant. Animals are people to children. The shock of finding one of your cousins would probably have been considerably less.”

“It would have. The thing was an accident, of course; he must have fallen over somehow, though he was sure-footed. I’ve never understood,” she broke off biting her lip. “But Betty-Ann was sure that Aunt Sarai had done it—she kept screaming that, and sobbing all night.

“Next evening I left her with the kitten when I had to go to the drawing-room. But after about twenty minutes she came in, looking wan as a little ghost, and continually stealing glances at the portrait as if it were a snake. She said she was afraid that if she didn’t go to the drawing-room Aunt Sarai would come after her. And find her there all alone.”

“She had relied on the dog’s protection, and now it was removed. I see. Did you try to get another?”

“I proposed it. She became hysterical, the way she never used to be, said she didn’t want any dog but William Tell—and that it wouldn’t be right to get another anyway because Aunt Sarai would only kill it too!

“I didn’t know what to do. She was too old for me to ask any of the servants to sit with her. So I sent for one of her old chums from Boston to make us a visit. I thought the chance for normal play again might take her mind off her diseased fancies. But everything went wrong from the beginning. The other child kept missing things—hair-ribbons and clothes and trinkets. She grew nervous too: accused Betty-Ann of playing tricks on her by hiding them. One day I found them fighting like cat and dog, scratching and biting—two well-brought-up little girls who had never, either of them, struck a playmate before. So that was that.”

“There was never any explanation of these disappearances?”

“No. Betty-Ann wouldn’t have done such things. She was pitifully anxious for her friend to like it here, to want to stay. Besides, things like that have always happened from time to time in Witch House. Joseph and Quincy and I used to miss things, and fight each other like little wildcats. And Aunt Sarai would laugh and say the house took them, that it had taken things over since she could remember and would take them after she was dead. Joseph says there were two spells of the same sort during the years I was away; he calls them poltergeist phenomena and pays no attention to them.”

“There could not—still keeping to our plan of eliminating the common causes first—be a possibility of thieving servants?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“No servants ever stay long at Witch House. Besides, it isn’t pilfering; the things always turn up again. And there have been instances when none of us could have been the practical joker. When you’ve seen a vase move forward an

inch or so on a table and then fling itself forward and smash, you do believe in undiscovered natural laws."

"I know. I've seen such things."

"I thought that." She flashed a keen glance at him. "Otherwise it would not have been much use to send for you. Betty-Ann would have been pre-judged. Only I, her mother, could be expected to feel certainty of course; but you will admit that there is a doubt?"

"Of her complicity in the tricks played upon her little friend? Certainly. But I'm less sure that her fear was not directly responsible for them in shaping events; she may have had a dread of her playmate's being driven away. And it *is* true that poltergeist phenomena can manifest itself only through a young person's vitality; she might have set them in operation as unconsciously as we phrase the sentences a planchette writes under our hands."

"I've considered that. I've hoped it." She made a discouraged gesture. "But there's more than that. The evening after her chum left Betty-Ann found her kitten almost torn to pieces—obviously by claws. Since there are no marauding animals on the island that always has been a mystery. And of course she set it down to Aunt Sarai.

"Things were so bad after that that in December I took her to California, claiming my annual few weeks of absence. And she bloomed there; she was so happy and sweet and like herself that I began to wonder if anything justified me in taking her back to this house. If it weren't better to risk starving her and disinheriting my cousins along with me. I thought it all over; I made up my mind.

"And then that night she woke up screaming—said that her hand had fallen over the edge of the bed, and another hand had reached up through the dark and taken hold of it,

that Aunt Sarai had come after us. There was no persuading her it was a nightmare. Nothing would do but that we must go back to Witch House; so Aunt Sarai wouldn't touch her again.

"I was set that she should not, and we lived through the most hellish three days imaginable. To see her crying quietly to herself as if she were broken, utterly broken, when she didn't know I saw was almost worse than the nights. She was so exhausted with her nightmares and her terror that she could hardly stand long enough to reach the train when we did leave, though she was wild with joy at the idea of going back—she had thought I was going to hold out forever and that she would have the nightmares always, or until Aunt Sarai did whatever it is a child thinks spooks will do."

"So you had to give in?" Carew's eyes were dark, and a little grim.

"Yes. To come back to it, with fresh variations." She shrugged whimsically. "I engaged a governess. I didn't think the time particularly ripe, but at least the girl could stay with Betty-Ann when I had to go to the drawing room.

"Things began to happen. Ornaments and toys broke and if the two tried to play a game—chess or parchesi—the board would fly into the air and throw the pieces on the floor. The governess would accuse Betty, naturally enough, and Betty would deny it. She left finally, saying that the child was unmanageable when she was out of my sight. I engaged another, who is leaving tomorrow."

"And are there still dreams?"

"No more than there were before. The dog used to sleep at the foot of Betty-Ann's bed, on it, in earlier years, if I did not watch out." A touch of a smile played over her lips for a

second. “The third night after he died she threw herself out of bed screaming because she’d wakened up and thought she saw someone standing over her in the dark. Only a black shape, but she was sure it was Aunt Sarai. She has slept with me ever since. She keeps having nightmares about hands reaching out to pull her from the bed; they’ve never actually touched her except there in the West. But she is afraid that sometime she won’t wake up and they will get her. It does not make for sound sleep.

“As to my aunt’s portrait—I suppose my cousins gave you their version of that?”

“They said that she tried to cut it to pieces. To destroy her enemy, I suppose?”

“Not exactly that. She didn’t believe that destroying the portrait would have killed Aunt Sarai’s ghost, though she never calls her a ghost; she said it would have kept her from coming back. She stole a butcher-knife from the kitchen and slipped into the drawing-room when I thought she was outdoors. She climbed on a chair and took down all the things on the mantel so that she wouldn’t break them while she was cutting up the picture. But a bowl rolled off the table where she had put it and smashed. She said she knew it was Aunt Sarai’s way of calling people in, but she tried to get the picture spoiled before they could come.”

“It was your cousin Quincy who caught her?”

“Yes. He was beside himself. He twisted her wrist to get the knife out of her hand; her arm was black-and-blue for days.” She spoke quietly, unemotionally, but he saw the slim hands in her lap clench. “I heard her scream of pain—you can tell the difference between that and fright or temper. He had set the portrait back on the mantel and was whirling to snatch Betty again when I came in. There was a

devil in his face. I told him to put her down—and he would not. So I struck him. It was a disgraceful scene. We were all reverting to savagery except Joseph. He finally dragged Quincy out of the room."

"Your cousin Joseph is the stronger man of the two?"

She hesitated. "I don't know. Perhaps not physically. But if you are excited, in less than perfect control of yourself, it is hard not to obey Joseph."

"And that is all?"

"That ends the list of Betty-Ann's performances—except for last week. Her glass broke at dinner. I was looking at her and I know that she hadn't touched it; but Zoia cried out that she had. Betty flew into a fury—screamed that if she were always accused of breaking things she would. She pulled at the tablecloth and sent half the dishes flying onto the floor. When I tried to take her out of the room she fought me, scratching and biting like a cat. Joseph had to help me and she bit him. It wasn't like a child's temper; she seemed to hate us. I've had to pick her up in tantrums before—all mothers have—but not in years and never like that.

"After we'd got her into bed I brought disinfectant and put it on my scratches before her and she cried and said she hadn't wanted to do it. But *something* had seemed to tell her to: 'I couldn't stop my arms and legs, Mother. I just couldn't! And all the time after the dishes broke *I* wasn't angry at all; I was just standing off, all sick and scared and miserable, *watching!*' I know you'll think that nonsense—anyone would. But I am certain that somehow, in her condition, it was true."

"I've no doubt on that point." Carew's voice had an unflawed quietness. "Hysteria, brought on by the

cumulative train of experiences and delusions you describe, could account for almost anything. She's been having the devil's own time of it, and with no chance of making anyone but you believe that all the deviltry isn't in herself. But what concerns me is the first cause of the trouble. It seems far less than half-explained, fanciful as nervous youngsters can be. Some mental suggestion planted in her mind, old tales about your aunt—"

"I've questioned her about that. She denies that anyone ever talked to her about Aunt Sarai. And I was always very careful; she knew only that Aunt Sarai was an unkind old woman who had brought me up and had been very angry with me for marrying her father. That seemed romantic to her." She frowned a little, adding, "Too romantic, perhaps. It may have helped along this obsession of hers that Aunt Sarai was a wicked witch."

"And when you came to Witch House you made light of the name, I suppose?"

"Yes. I told her that superstitious people had hanged an ancestress of ours, but Quincy unfortunately let out old Joseph's French history—the accusation, the fire in the jail."

"And yet she casts herself for the role of victim, not witch," Carew murmured. He glanced towards the darkness above the fireplace. "Why does the portrait hang with its face to the wall?"

"For fear Betty-Ann might elude me in the night and break a window and climb in." She smiled wryly. "It's too heavy for her to turn by herself. Joseph and Quincy turn it when we come in here in the evenings. If you'd like to see it —"

"I should."

“Turn it and come back towards me: I’ll turn on the main chandelier. You can get the best effect at a distance.”

He did not try to look at the great, wood-backed canvas as he turned it; he could have seen little by the smoky glow of the flames below. He knew that behind him Elizabeth Stone was moving back towards the door, but he could not hear her. She walked lightly, as he had noticed that her cousins did, with the soft, springy lightness of a cat.

But when he was two-thirds of the way back across the room it burst into a sudden blaze of artificial light. For a second the effect was startling, as though he stood in the heart of some opening, fierce flower of fire.

He turned and looked back towards the fireplace.

At first glance it seemed as if a withered old woman were sitting atop the white mantel, shrivelled talon-like hands folded in her black silk lap, her black, beady eyes smiling in mocking, satisfied evil out of the yellow, wrinkled face under the white cap. A painting done after the amazingly realistic manner of Sargent, the painted body seeming, at a little distance, to stand out in front of the canvas, separate and distinct from it as actual flesh and blood.

As he drew nearer the painted figure seemed to flatten and retreat into the canvas. The effect was not the usual flat dispelling of illusion: it was more like the intelligent and deliberate deception of a cunning thing recoiling to avoid suspicion, waiting its time to strike. There was one large gash in the canvas; Betty-Ann’s knife had missed the dreaded face by only the fraction of an inch.

Elizabeth Ann was still standing by the light-switch, gazing coolly across the distance from which her aunt’s figure must look like flesh and blood.

“I wonder why she had herself painted in black; she preferred purple.” Her low clear voice came from between lips that were set in a hard little smile. “Many an evening when I was small she used to sit like that amusing herself by frightening me with stories of the house until I could not sleep. And it meant a whipping to disturb her in the night. I nearly went mad until the boys came and Joseph would slip into my room and talk until I stopped being afraid. We used to talk madness enough, there in the night. But she looks quiet enough to me now.”

Before dinner Gaylord Carew met his patient: a slim, delicately pretty child with her mother’s black curls and white skin, but eyes brilliantly blue as Persian turquoise. Unhappy, suspicious eyes: they stared at him with the sullen and watchful misery of a child who has been badgered and criticized until she sees every stranger as a resented enemy.

She acknowledged Elizabeth’s introduction with an unenthusiastic “I’m glad to know you, Dr. Carew,” and gave him her hand.

He made no overtures; he shook the small limp hand and answered her as casually as if she had been eighteen or twenty-eight; then paid her no further attention.

They ate an uneventful dinner. Quincy and Zoia were at pains to appear friendly and casual; they got, by some odd, delicate balancing of manner, neither help nor hindrance from Elizabeth. And Joseph was thoroughly at ease, watching with his saturnine little smile. Betty-Ann never spoke except to accept or reject food; she ate methodically

and unenthusiastically, a sombre little figure woven tightly into her own cocoon of gloom.

Once, when Quincy made a heavy attempt at friendly pleasantry—“Well, how did the lessons go today, Betty-Ann?” she favored him with a queerly alert blue stare, said, “All right, thanks, Cousin Quincy,” and dropped her eyes to her plate again. She gave the effect of being glad to drop the sight of him also, as if it had been something hot and squirming that she had had to hold for a second, in unwilling hands.

Carew knew that all their thoughts were darting about like little lightings. Scurrying around him like small, excited animals. What would he think? What would he do? Would his presence alter the situation? “And if so,”—the same thought in each mind—“what will it mean to me?”

Five actors playing allotted parts on a set stage; and now he, for whom no part had been written, had walked onto the stage unexpectedly, because one of the players had turned rebel, as she had once before. He threw everything out of focus, and them into a fever. The heat and intensity of these flying questions was enough to make a man with even partially trained clairvoyant faculties feel as if he sat in a room filled with flashing fireflies.

He took warning and withdrew himself to a cold inner isolation, as he knew how to do, even while laughing and talking with surface ease. It would not do to let his mind become clouded with emotion; or open any door of his imagination. But the impressions that came across that safer inner distance did not make his companions seem less dramatic, more normal: they were still out of focus. Something about the picture was distorted, even to a clear vision. The sense of evil was as strong as ever although the

lurking Presence seemed to have retreated into a far background.

He saw presently what the distortion was.

Their modern figures were somehow incongruous in the old house, not at home. Like actors who had somehow got onto the wrong stage, onto sets with which their voices and costumes clashed. Interlopers. Or else—actors of an old school dressed up in an unbecoming masquerade.

Witch House was an old house. Not old as other houses are old, that remain beds of the continuous stream of life, of marriages and births and deaths, of children crying and children laughing, where the past is only part of the pattern, root of the present and the future. Joseph de Quincy, dead nearly a quarter of a thousand years, was still its master: he had been strong, so strong that no later personality could dim or efface him here where he had set his seal.

“He left his evil here when he could no longer stay himself,” Carew thought. “As a man with diphtheria leaves germs on the things he has handled, the bed he has lain in. Thoughts are tangible things; on their own plane they breed like germs and, unlike germs, they do not die. He may have forgotten; he may even walk the earth in other flesh, but what he has left here lives.”

As probably it had been meant to do. For the man whose malignance, swollen with the contributions of the centuries, still ensouled these walls would not have cared to build a house or found a family except as a means to an end. Witch House was set like a mold, steeped in ritual atmosphere as a temple.

Dangerous business, for who could say that such a temple would not find a god? There are low, non-human

beings that coalesce with and feed on such leftover forces: lair in them.

The great events of normal living had always been dwarfed or incidental here, subordinate to the real business for which the house had been built. Suppressed or hidden passions, secret vices, strange lusts of the mind and soul, more deadly than the body's—all these and the flesh and blood that had been laid upon their altars. Packed between these old walls was a force hostile to life. To the changing sun and shade, to the temperateness and kindliness and sweetness of normal life. To all vitality but the flame of fever, that vivid, poisoned excess of life which is akin to death.

"Everything here that was not too dull to be reached would inevitably be infected. Set to vibrating at an abnormal rate. A stimulus like that of drugs, only worse, because it would act far more directly on the moral nature, not having to spend any of its force in reaching this through the body. It would take a very pure mind and a very strong one not to develop the contagion in some form after years spent here."

And he looked at the five masks around him. Not much to be read there yet. They were all wary, leagued together and yet separate, inimical to each other. Striving and yet all moving parts of an inescapable pattern. It vibrated in the air around them like a low, continuous tune, janglingly discordant, the sense of their strife.

Was it by chance that the dead woman's will had bound them so? Will—in the double meaning of the word: a legal document, and a strong, relentless human force.

After dinner the four rose to go into the drawing-room. There was something almost ritualistic in that plainly

habitual movement; they were all going in to sit under that painted figure as under an idol, under the painted, sneering eyes. Elizabeth stopped and smiled at Carew.

“I won’t say goodnight because we’ll meet later. Betty, you won’t see Miss Turner tonight. Dr. Carew has offered to stay with you and let her pack.”

She added no admonition, and the child said nothing. But her eyes clung to the woman as long as she was within sight; followed her, with a curious horrified fascination, to the drawing-room door. Then she turned and said with listless dreariness, “I suppose you don’t know the way to the sittingroom, Dr. Carew; I’ll show you.”

She padded off on small light feet, sullenly silent as a shadow again. There was a thick gloom around her.

Carew could tell what she was feeling: the intense humiliation of a child who has lived much with older people and prizes jealously the small measure of their dignity that she has wrung from the years, when circumstances make her seem worse than a baby again, destructive and deceitful, and she can do nothing: only wait, in helpless terror, for her own disgrace.

And now it was all to begin over again: getting used to the suspicions, the surprise, the repressed anger, of a new person. She did not like him: definitely, but dully, because she was very tired, she disliked him. He was to be another instrument of her torture; and she was more afraid of men. They might go into tempers, like Cousin Quincy. Mother had said that this man would be different, but mother had been hopeful about each of the governesses.

It was a long time since Betty-Ann had been hopeful about people; she hated everyone she now met, in advance, with a dull red feeling, because they would soon think she

did awful things and told stories, and ought to be spanked. Sometimes the hate seemed almost like an old feeling, something that she had felt a long time ago, before she could remember. But she had never used to hate people, even when she had been angry with them. This new feeling felt queer and ugly, even when it was most like something old that was coming back again.

There had been additions to the house since Joseph de Quincy built it. Elizabeth Stone and her child lived in the east wing, as Quincy and Zoia did in the west. The will had forbidden any refurnishing. No present personality might set his altering, self-protecting stamp on Witch House. But Elizabeth had been able to intrude some subtly invading touches of herself. A gay rose coverlet on a dark old teakwood table; a modern tea-cart with bright silver tea things; a cheerful French tapestry on a wall.

Yet the brightening innovations harmonized; they did not clash with the room—resouled it, rather. The figures in the tapestry were in Colonial dress; the red-and-gold lacquer of the tea-cart chorded with the Chinese vases on the mantel.

Carew noted that all the breakable ornaments in the room had been set high, beyond Betty-Ann’s reach. An alibi to prove the existence of the poltergeist?

He settled down near the fire with a newspaper. But for Betty-Ann there was no settling down; she roamed about restlessly, her hands tightly clasped behind her, carefully touching nothing, as determinedly quiet as her little feet were ceaselessly active. Some fiery nervousness drove her; she was strung and tensed like a wire charged with electric current. Carew could see how exquisitely irritating the hot unpleasant vibration of that restlessness would have been to a not abnormally nervous person, as the fear of people in

jungles or wild places is said to generate the hydrocyanic acid that, discernible to their sensitive sense of smell, enrages wild beasts.

And the testy, typically human order for her to stop fidgeting would have played straight into the hands of disturbance, raised the jangling discord within her to a pitch that, sooner or later, must have found surface expression.

But he had been through a training that made for cool and tranquil nerves, and whose first taboo was temper. He read on, undisturbed; and she went on pacing.

Back and forth. Up and down. From one end of the room to the other. Into all four corners. Now zig-zagging, now straight; but never ceasing. Her eyes moved also, frequently in a different direction from her body. Dark and opaque they stared at the pale oblongs of blind that hid the windows; sometimes they shifted warily, fleeting and brilliant as lightnings, to his face.

Outside the drizzling rain had begun again. It pattered around the house, and on the roofs and eaves, like a million, tiny, stealthy feet: softly, as though the night were teeming with a host of minute, dark beings.

Nor was all the darkness outside. Carew had known that from the beginning. The lurking unhuman presence that had withdrawn from the dining-room was here: stronger in this room than elsewhere, pressing closer: its consciousness somehow more vivid, its subtle blackness in some way more solid. Carew practised certain mental exercises to keep his mind clear of it, free to concentrate upon the child. Above all, not to generate any vibrations that might be communicated to her. He could see that thick heavy blackness despite the brilliance of the lights.

Betty-Ann’s eyes sought uneasily the patches of darkness that were doorways leading into the black unlit rooms beyond the sitting-room.

Tonight was one of the nights when something happened. She knew that by a special *feel* the darkness had. It was more alive, it seemed to want to press forward through those doorways beyond which it could not come.

The windows suddenly turned into eyes. They looked the same, but they were different. There was an alert, *seeing* menace in every pale blind, as though something outside burnt through them to watch her.

She went to the nearest window and began raising and lowering the blind. Carew heard its queer mechanical groan repeated and repeated; saw the streaming oblong of darkness flash in and out of sight with weird, regular speed.

She left the window and rested against the wall beside it like an animal in ambush. Then, quick as lightning, she jumped forward again and jerked the blind up.

But there was only darkness there. Nothing had been caught off guard.

The noise had rung loud in her ears. She moved back to the wall again, eyeing Carew apprehensively, but he made no sound.

He was leaving her free where others had always tried to occupy her or amuse her when she was too nervous to keep her mind on anything, and their own suppressed irritation or anxiety only further excited her. And this very lack of attempt to force himself upon her attention began to focus it. He was something new. He was neither a stern disapproval nor a hail-fellow-well-met geniality secretly watching to entrap her. So far he had been only polite and

friendly. As if she were no different from other people. As if there were nothing queer or bad about her.

But he did know about things; he was only pretending. Was he waiting to pounce on her?

It was the moment for which Carew had waited. To have her interest centered upon himself, even in suspicion of some new form of attack, was better for her than that continual spying on the dark that she thought spied on her; and he had gained an advantage by not having coerced that interest: it was genuine, not artificial.

And by now she would be tired of waiting.

He looked up and smiled at her with quiet friendliness. “Is there anything you want to do, Betty-Ann?”

She eyed him with wary, tired suspicion. “You mean play games?”

Carew said with a warm and easy gentleness, “Not if there’s anything else you’d rather do.”

But she answered somberly, without looking at him, “It doesn’t make any difference. If it weren’t tonight it would be some other night.”

She brought out the chessmen as cheerfully, he thought, as she might have fetched rack and thumb-screws.

They sat down, the board between them.

Carew saw at once that the child was not a bad player. The red and the white ivory figures facinated her. She had a keen enough brain to plan the campaign of her king and queen shrewdly, her imagination stirred by the romance of their exalted rank. And the intricacies of the game would have left an older head no time for brooding. He saw interest gradually gather in the small face and fade the nervousness, and the little hands grew quick and sure, no longer listless.

Then suddenly, with the swift violence of a springing animal, the board rose from their knees. Kings and queens, knights and pawns, went flying through the air, crashed to the floor.

Betty-Ann screamed: a sharp, horrified cry. But Carew laughed as he rose.

“Well, we’ll have to pick them up again.”

She cast him one wondering, sidelong glance, then scrambled eagerly and relievedly to her knees and helped him gather up the pieces. They re-arranged the game as best they could, from memory. Betty-Ann’s careful eagerness to give Carew’s men the benefit of every doubt, not to put her own forward, was a pathetic effort to disarm suspicion; it would have intensified most observers’.

They went on playing. For a few minutes nothing happened. Then again the board rose as if shot from a cannon’s mouth. This time Carew had to depend on his own memory. Betty-Ann put the pieces down anywhere, blunderingly, sometimes mixing the colors.

Once Carew gently laid a hand on the confusing small ones; he said with a suggestion of a laugh in his voice, “You’re divorcing my king from my queen and marrying him to yours, Betty. Such arbitrary interference in other people’s family affairs isn’t wise.”

She tried nervously to smile. “Oh, I have! I’m sorry, Dr. Carew. I thought I had my own king—truly I did!”

They played again. But it was hard for her to keep her mind on the game now. She made her moves slowly and laboriously, and her eyes kept darting down to that patch of shadow under the board, between her feet and his.

The crash came—the red and white chessmen hurtled through the air!

Carew rose, but Betty-Ann stayed in her chair. She put an arm over her face and began sobbing, not loudly, but with a sick steadiness as if something inside her had broken and she could not stop.

There was a silver pitcher on one table, and Carew poured some water out onto his handkerchief. He moved the shielding arm with a quick, light gentleness, and bathed the hot, stained face.

“It isn’t wise to cry, Betty-Ann.” His voice was unconcerned and not admonitory: quietly kind. “Whatever plays these interesting tricks will only be pleased to see it can disturb you. If you paid no attention, there would be no fun in them.”

She turned suddenly and caught his arm with small, frantic hands, her wide, wet eyes a desperate, unbelieving appeal. “Then you don’t think *I* do it, Dr. Carew? You know it isn’t me?”

He laughed softly, with a touch of amusement. “I know you were too interested in the game there at first to have wanted any thing to interfere with it. And I don’t think you’d choose this way of amusing yourself; you very plainly weren’t enjoying it-”

“Everybody else always says I do it. Not mother—she isn’t ever cross with me; she knows I don’t tell stories. And it’s so horrible, without being blamed; it scares me so to think there’s something under the board, something I can’t see. I’m so afraid!”

“Such things happen in a few houses, Betty-Ann.” His voice was calm, matter-of-fact. “Scientists haven’t yet discovered exactly what makes them, but the tricks aren’t very clever. They’re always the sort a child would play—that is what makes people suspect you. You don’t really

believe," he was smiling slightly, "that a genuine, efficient spook would stoop to upset a chessboard, do you?"

The turquoise eyes clung, wide and miserable, to his face.

"I know it seems silly just tonight, Dr. Carew, but when it goes on and on it doesn't. It's awful then. I can't do anything—anything! I can't play with dolls any more, because they break. Gloria—she was the one I brought from home, and I liked her best—fell right out of my arms and smashed on the floor—as if *something* had jerked her away from me." She shuddered.

Carew stifled a flame of fierce, quick anger. Anger was an element native to whatever force operated here; could be turned to its own ends even when felt against it. One does not charge an enemy's battery with one's own power. His thoughts must give off only cooling, tranquillizing vibrations here.

He said gently, "I know that was bad. But it's rather cheap, this invisible tease. Suppose we just go on acting, living ordinarily, as though nothing were happening? Without making any more fuss, any of us?"

Her eyes widened. No more fuss, no more excitement, no being upset any more—for a moment the vista looked like freedom. Then the terror of the invisible rushed back.

"But I can't help being scared! I couldn't—I just can't!"

"I know you can't help feeling scared, Betty." His voice softened to its first touch of actual tenderness. "But you can help acting scared if you keep on trying. Being afraid is nothing to be ashamed of; it isn't brave to do something you're not afraid to do.

"We won't worry about these things any more; we won't pay any attention to them. Letting them frighten us only

encourages them to happen. I know that won't work on dolls for awhile, things you get fond of. But games are different. If we only laugh at the accidents and treat them as a joke, make them a part of the game, I don't think there will be so many of them long."

She stared at him. Something seemed to be being poured into, not *at,* her, from him: something warm and friendly. It was good to be believed, to hear everything that was big and horrible made to sound spiteful and small. Almost she believed him; he was big and good and strong, he had seen what had always upset everyone else, and he had not been bothered at all.

She said, "Shall we pick up the men and go right on?"

"No. I think you're too tired tonight. We'll play again tomorrow, when you're fresh." Carew never presumed on victory; he knew that patience is infinitely more valuable than time. Best to hold the gains he had made; let the seeds he had planted grow. The fears were full-grown already, flourishing in the field of her mind.

It was her scream—a sudden sharp, horrible cry like some little wounded animal's—that told him they were no longer alone. Her eyes were fixed upon the window. She had not pulled the blind down after that last frantic attempt to surprise whatever hid outside; the black patch of darkness still stared in at them, had gathered and condensed into a living core—

A great hare, so black that his body was only an outline, a little blacker and thicker than the night, his yellow-green eyes intent upon them. For a moment they met Carew's, winking and steady and malignant, and he knew that in them was complete and conscious evil, an intelligence living and personal as his own, and not merely one of those

hideous, half-conscious images that a child's enflamed imagination might draw up out of the layer upon layer of dark thought-forms that ensouled Witch House.

Carew took a step forward; the hare vanished.

There was no sign of it when he reached the window; he had known that there would not be. That form had not been real, though a consciousness more vivid than any animal's had manifested itself through it. And he called up the iron in himself to meet an iron struggle: this was worse than he had feared.

Betty-Ann was beside him, clutching his arm again, wild, excited little face peering up frenziedly into his.

"You did see it, Dr. Carew, you *did!* You know it was really there!"

He said quietly, "I saw a hare. And I am sure it did not mean to be seen." (He was sure of that, why he could not have told.) He laughed. "I'm afraid it isn't a very brave animal, Betty. It ran away as soon as I started towards it."

"It doesn't want to be touched. William Tell touched it once." Her voice had shrunk to an excited whisper. "The week before he died. Oh, I'm not making it up just now—mother knows; I told her about it when it happened. We were playing out in the grounds toward evening and William Tell growled at something all of a sudden, and I looked around and there *it* was, watching us from behind a bush. It made me feel funny—it looked so big and black and queer. But it was gone in a minute, and I thought William Tell had scared it. I was surprised at him; I told him he mustn't bother poor rabbits; he wasn't usually cross like that.

"Then I went on playing, and forgot about it. And after awhile the red went out of the sunset and things began to

get darker and sort of misty, and it wasn't nice out any more. We started home. And then we saw the hare again, sitting farther down the patch watching us, between us and the house. I stopped; I didn't quite like to go on around it; I felt queer.

"But William Tell got awful mad all of a sudden; he growled and ran at it, got its shoulder in his teeth before it could get away. And I ran after him, yelling because I was afraid he'd hurt it; he'd always been trained not to chase cats or anything; but it got away before I reached them. And William Tell growled deep down in his throat and kept looking around for it all the way back to the house. The hair on his back was stiff—it stood up under my hand."

"And that was the only time you ever saw it?"

She hesitated. "It was the only time I've ever seen it with my eyes—in front of me. I've seen it inside my head—hanging there like a picture on a wall, you know—with black cats all around it, lots of times, but when I raise the blind it isn't ever there. But you'll only think I'm telling crazy stories.

"They say—Cousin Quincy and Cousin Zoia and maybe Cousin Joseph—" the small hands that tightened convulsively on Carew's arm were hot and stiff, and her breath caught in a little gasp of unbearable pain, "that I did it, that *I* killed William Tell, took him up on the cliffs where I'm not supposed to go, and he either fell or I pushed him off. And I loved him so! I'd sooner have killed anybody I know—except mother."

She was shaking with sobs again and shivering. He put his hand on her shoulder.

"That's rather too silly to worry about, Betty-Ann. Are these black cats like the hare?"

“No. They’re smaller; they only want me to play with them. Fly away with them to a place on the other side of the moon. There’s a garden there, all silvery-gold, and the cats and hares dance and jump round and round. They can jump so much farther than they can on earth; it’s like flying, and they love it so. Sometimes I’ve felt as if I’d like to dance and jump through the air too, they looked so happy, and I’ve thought maybe if I did I wouldn’t be afraid any more, but when I look they’re all dancing round a Figure that sits still in the middle of the garden. A big black Figure with a hood on. And It hasn’t got any face. Its face is so awful that It keeps it covered. And then I get so terribly afraid. And everything stops.”

“And you see all that in the picture?”

“I don’t know.” She hesitated again. “I think it’s partly dreams. After I’ve thought *they* were at the windows—the cats and the big hare. They sit there and watch, you see, after I’ve gone to sleep. But they don’t come often. I don’t usually know what’s there.”

She came closer and whispered, her blue eyes earnest and weird, “I don’t think it’s an *animal* hare. I think it’s Aunt Sarai’s hare, that maybe it came from—hell. It isn’t swearing to say that word just as the name of a place, is it? That’s why people used to be so scared of witches’ black cats, isn’t it, because they thought they weren’t earth-cats, they were from the devil? Mother says there isn’t any hell or any witches. But Aunt Sarai was a witch; that’s why she can come back. I think they’ve all been witches here; the house is mad because mother wouldn’t be; that’s why it wants me now.”

Carew said, “It was all dreams, Betty. There is no hell. There is no garden on the other side of the moon. It’s a

dead world, full of volcanic craters, with no air for anything to grow in or breathe. A hare frightened you and, being nervous, you've had nightmares about it—pictures that fear paints on your mind just as an artist would on canvas, with paints and brushes.

"Every dream is now a movie we make for ourselves in our sleep; you can see that. Our minds have the power to do that; we've studied our bodies, all the corpuscles and glands and tiny things we'd never have dreamed we had except for microscopes, but we haven't found out yet how strangely and marvellously our minds are made; we've no microscope for them. If we had we shouldn't have to go to sleep to make pictures for ourselves; we could do it when we pleased."

He had the power of putting glamor into his voice, of drawing and illumining many-colored images with it. Her eyes widened, thrilled and fascinated by this brighter aspect of the miraculous.

"Then you mean if we knew how, we could make ourselves movies—pictures of gardens and everything?"

"Yes." He laughed. "But I'm afraid it will be a long time before we know. In the meantime we mustn't take those we make unconsciously too seriously."

But her imagination had already veered back to that dark stream of thought from which he had momentarily deflected it; was caught again in the current.

"But what made the hare come back tonight? He's real—he's awfully real. What does he want?"

Carew shrugged. "I don't know. Whatever it was, he ran away again: hares don't like being close to people."

Morning broke with clear skies. The island glistened coldly in wan sunshine, the grey sullen face of the waters touched here and there with feeble sparkles of light that could not reach their depths.

Carew spent most of the day outdoors with Elizabeth and his patient. Betty-Ann loved the sunshine, ran and danced with the bright, energetic playfulness of a kitten, and was eager to show Carew the island. At noon she did not want to go back to the house, pleading for a picnic on the beach.

But Elizabeth shook her head. “It’s too cold to sit still, Betty. We couldn’t.”

“Couldn’t we eat walking around just this once?” Betty-Ann protested, but she gave way without whining or temper. Carew noted the contrast to her hysterical moods after dark.

They ate in the east wing; the three cousins breakfasted and lunched apart, assembling in the dining-room only at night. Betty-Ann chattered brightly and volubly at lunch.

But as the afternoon wore her gayety was shot with fits of brooding. She began to look about her uneasily, behind the bushes and into the lengthening shadows.

“The shadows stretch out so. I wish they wouldn’t.”

Elizabeth said casually, “They always do in the afternoon. It’s the earth turning away from the sun that makes them do it. You’ve studied that in school.”

Betty-Ann answered listlessly, “Yes, I know.” There was a pause. Then, “It’s getting chilly. Let’s go back in where we can turn on the lights.”

They went in, in silence.

It was a quarter of three. Not yet dark, even on a winter day, though the clouds were gathering again in the west. Carew left Elizabeth and her daughter in rooms where

electric lights were already blazing. There was no good in being firm with that secretive, constant searching of shadows.

In the main hall he met Joseph, and a saturnine smile.

“Any luck, Doctor?”

Carew answered, “Neither good nor bad so far.”

Joseph shrugged. “Well, that’s a good start. But I’m afraid you’ll find Witch House, in conjunction with Quincy blood, an incurable disease. Quincy, who is less materialistic than he pretended yesterday, is one type of instance, and Betty-Ann another. She’s more uncomfortable than most of us, poor kid; her father had nervous weaknesses of his own. Elizabeth should never have married Stone.”

Carew reflected that this was one subject on which there seemed to be universal agreement. He recalled the picture he had seen in Mrs. Harris’s mind of Elizabeth as a young witch, coldly beguiling Hugh Stone into doing her will: a girl marrying for fear, not love.

Doubtless these other men who had wanted to marry her drew another picture, one that they liked even less. Which brother would have been the favored one if she had not run away? Joseph? Not Quincy.

He asked, “Is it your claim that blood tells in every Quincy?”

“More or less. We run respectable—and the opposite—by fits and starts. But I think the staid elders were as preoccupied with hell as the would-be witches: it kept them busy running from it. And looking back over their shoulders, perhaps. All of us have this curiosity about the Unseen. Elizabeth and I carried on some crazy scientific experiments here when we were youngsters—weird and

unsuccessful ones. Quincy would probably have had more chance to find out something; he's a more primitive type."

"Trained brains are barriers, for awhile," Carew agreed.

"That's esoteric doctrine, isn't it?" Joseph was smiling, "The idea that the primeval race had spiritual faculties, clairvoyant vision like that ascribed to animals, and had to give it up in order to develop the brain, which must now help us to win it back. So may men become like gods. Interesting—but slow work."

Carew nodded. "Very slow."

Joseph Quincy shrugged again. "And perhaps that's as well. Would you like to see the family portraits, Doctor—a background for your case? They've overflowed from the drawingroom into the hall—all the generations from old Joseph's son, down. Unfortunately, we haven't my revered namesake's own. But they're an interesting lot. I've got the drawing-room key today. Zoia and I take turns sharing its custody. I hate slighting Elizabeth, but there's always the chance that the child might get hold of it if she had it."

He kept up a rapid fire of enlightening comment as they inspected the long processions that covered the drawing-room walls and filed off down the dark passage.

"You can tell the good by the strain in their faces. Afraid of hell—as Betty-Ann is of the dark. They valued their souls—that is, their spiritual skins. The Revolutionary master of the house looks pretty contented. There was a legend of the Devil taking him. But his son was an orthodox soul. You can see him yonder, between his father and his son."

Carew looked. The dark lean face had the enigmatic reserve of so many of the Quincys, but there was a kind of inner torment in it. It looked more savage than the closed,

serene face of his father, or the vital, gayly sardonic son, who had been painted in middle-age, with a wooden leg.

But Gaylord Carew's eyes flew to the next canvas.

She sat there smiling faintly, enigmatically, the Chinese lady, in her red-and-gold trousers, with the jade ornaments in her black lacquer hair. A face as deep as the sea and as primly pretty as an ivory miniature. Glowingly alien and yet not alien: somehow at home.

Joseph turned, his odd smile flicking across his face again.

"Captain Pegleg and the unlawful wife of his bosom—my own honored ancestress, Li Wan. My brother still bears an Anglicized spelling of the name. Chinese surnames come first, you know, before the personal name."

"Barret told me," Carew said. "She is very beautiful."

"Yes. The Captain had good taste. She was a lady too, not a wanton. Her father was a Chinese official in Mongolia; he followed the usual practise of bribe-taking somewhat too assiduously for a man who had enemies at court, and ended by losing his head both figuratively and literally. The last, of course, when the Emperor recalled him. His family was brought pretty low. One of Li Wan's father's widows sold her, and Captain Pegleg was the buyer."

Carew glanced again at the portrait.

"And your Aunt Sarai, I gather, would have been a girl of twelve, living here with her parents, when they came home?"

Joseph grinned. "She didn't live here more than a few hours after that. Her mother packed herself and her husband and children off, bag and baggage. But Sarai had taken a fancy to the older girl—Li Wan was only three or four years the elder—and sneaked back a few times to see

her, for which her horrified mother beat her black and blue every time she found it out. She had a vitriolic temper: there may have been method in Captain Pegleg's madness—he may have found living in sin pleasanter than living with his daughter-in-law. None of his own children ever set foot in his house again—except to exhort him, and then they got as good as they gave."

"I can imagine that." Carew glanced at the old sea-rover's merry, sardonic face, and laughed a little.

Joseph chuckled.

"And the joke of it is that Li Wan was as shocked at them as they at her. She was Chinese: of an ancestor-worshipping race. She had never heard of such rebellious and impious children as these who left their father's house and berated him to his face because he had followed accepted usage and taken a concubine. To her her position was honorable; she served him as loyally as a Chinese wife. When he was on his death-bed and they came with the minister she barred them out, intent on guarding him and giving his last hours peace, with the result that they ever after suspected her of having poisoned him with her heathen herbs."

Carew said quietly, glancing at him, "How long was 'ever after?' "

Joseph looked sharply at him, then laughed.

"So old Barret didn't tell you? I thought as much. It was not very long. They had their revenge. His will left her the custody of her little son, but they had the courts set that aside. Conscience worked with malice very easily there. To have left the child with a heathen, idol-worshipping mother would have been his damnation. It was their duty to take him from her and they did it—just as thoroughly as Aunt

Sarai had been belabored with the birch switch, by way of saving her soul through her skin.

“Li Wan cursed them, it’s quite likely that she knew how; her Mongol mother’s uncle had been a miracle-worker, a *Hutukhtu* or Incarnate God. She prayed to her gods that only daughters might be born to her lord’s rebellious and wicked sons who had troubled their father’s death-bed and set aside his last commands, and to the sons already born to them: that if sons were born they might die. That their seed might wither and their house perish, save through her son’s sons. Then she killed herself.”

There was a silence in the deepening shadows. Joseph Quincy laughed and moved to the electric light switch. Li Wan flashed out into sudden brilliance, smiling enigmatically in her canvas home.

“You can see the portraits better this way; I should have done it before. An ugly, barbaric old story of course. But all the barbarism wasn’t on Li Wan’s side. And she got her way pretty well. There *was* a dearth of male Quincys after that, though of course it was an old, inbred family probably about due for a decrease in vitality anyway; and girl babies for reasons material science can’t adequately explain, though occult science can, are tougher. Elizabeth’s father was the last. And Aunt Sarai didn’t hesitate to say the curse had worked when she had my brother and me fetched from France. Aunt Sarai always enjoyed flaunting superstitions.”

Carew thought of Elizabeth’s still-born little brother and the hall seemed to grow darker despite the blaze of light. He shrugged inwardly. The unproven possibility, if it were a fact, was of no importance now.

He said soberly, “You’re right, Quincy. The worst of the barbarism was not on Li Wan’s side.”

He became aware, as he spoke, that Joseph Quincy was not listening to him and that another was.

Joseph gave a short laugh. “So it’s you, is it? Will you never learn that it’s no good to step softly—if you will throw your thought out in such hot sprays around you?”

Quincy Lee, coming round the bend in the corridor beyond which neither man could have seen him, had the arrogant self-confidence that is the hall-mark of insolence trying to carry off an embarrassing situation. Some inner heat did indeed bubble round him. Carew thought: *Was it unconscious clairvoyance—result of long intimacy, or are Joseph’s senses well enough trained for him to feel a man’s thoughts as another would see or feel his body?*

“I merely wanted to hear what you and Dr. Carew were talking about, Brother.” He laughed.

Joseph did also, lightly and coldly.

“Then I should prefer for you to listen in the light. This old center of the house is supposed to be mine, Quincy, until evening, as the wings are yours and Elizabeth’s. Yet yesterday when you saw Dr. Carew’s boat coming to the landing, you sent Zoia in to receive him, without notifying either Elizabeth or me. And today you come in very quietly by yourself. If you keep it up I shall make myself free of the west wing, and I don’t imagine that you always care for unexpected visitors there.”

Quincy smiled unpleasantly. “I thought you might be talking of me, Joseph. I apologize, Dr. Carew; you see what cat-and-dog lives we lead here; Elizabeth and Joseph play lone hands—you never had the success you wanted there, did you, Brother?—but they always stand together against me. It makes for precautions.”

Carew laughed softly. “I refuse to be involved.”

“Except with Elizabeth?” Quincy said silkily, and Carew saw Joseph stiffen a little. Quincy smiled at that. “I beg pardon; I meant professionally, of course; as a woman Elizabeth is out of the running, tied to Witch House. She has nine years still to serve here, and no man would care to share a sentence like that with her.”

Carew thought, *“He is jealous—madly jealous; so that he cannot keep his tongue off the subject even if it means suggesting the thing he fears to me.”*

So those fires still burned. He wondered what their fuel was now—Quincy’s passion or his vanity. Quincy was a man to hate passionately the idea of another’s possessing what he had coveted, even if he no longer desired it; and to both these men Elizabeth must have stood for immeasurably more than herself: for the mastery of Witch House, of old Sarai’s fortune, and the refounding (important to the Chinese mind) of the line.

And the richly dowered bride, the prize to be contended for between the two of them, had left them both: had been an individual and a rebel, refused to play the part decreed for her.

Was it, in some way, for this, that her child suffered now? Witch House exacting its own price.

Quincy was going on. “I’ve sometimes wondered whether Aunt Sarai was blind or whether it was a devilish joke of hers to coop up the three of us here together like this. None of us can leave the house without disinheriting the other two, but if one or two of us died—well, the survivors, or survivor, would simply be the richer. It seems rather like an invitation.”

Joseph smiled coldly and lazily. “After that warning I’ll keep my door locked at night, Quincy.”

“You do already,” Quincy flashed, and instantly regretted the slip; Carew saw him bite his lip.

Joseph’s smile grew colder, but he made no comment. Instead he drawled, “It does seem rather like putting temptation in our way—especially, considering our well-known mutual harmony and family affection—and Aunt Sarai was a person to believe in the survival of the fittest. But the motive is too obvious; the police would not have much trouble in finding the means and the opportunity. If there were only one survivor, in particular, Quincy, his own fate would also be practically sealed.”

“Or if only one died, and the other two married!” Quincy shot out the words in a sort of hiss. “Wouldn’t it be equally obvious then, Brother?”

Joseph’s face was impassive. “It might be managed if it were not all tommyrot.”

Watching them, Carew thought the cat-and-dog simile not a bad one. Quincy was the snarling, low-bred cur; Joseph the smooth sleek black cat. Admiration for the latter mingled with repulsion; he had the sleek fine detachment of a cat, picking its way unconcernedly through the passionate turmoil around it, intent on its own designs, as void of anger as of compassion. He was only playing with his brother now: amusing, perhaps, some cold mischief of the intellect: no heat of hate. He was without heat.

Perhaps this inhuman aloofness was the best defence one of his blood could build against Witch House.

Carew knew that the saturnine eyes were shifting to him.

“I’m afraid this barking and scratching fraternal interchange is hardly the entertainment to offer Dr. Carew. We had better change the subject.”

Quincy said heavily, “You began it, Joe.” He turned to Carew with an attempt at a jovial laugh. “You see, Doctor, he’s got a woman’s trick of always getting the last word. Not that it means anything; we’ve scrapped like this ever since I can remember, and we’ll keep it up until one of us is dead. Joe is Elizabeth’s champion: he’s got a crow to pick with me now because he thinks I was in some kind of conspiracy to mislead you yesterday. Simply because, though I know the house is queer enough, I can’t believe there’s something psychic behind every row Betty-Ann raises. What do you make of her yourself, Doctor?”

Joseph’s question, too; they were both of them more keenly concerned to know, or to know what he thought, than they would admit; though neither of them cared for the child. Carew considered a moment, then said gravely, “I think it’s a case of hysteria induced by partial clairvoyance. You’re no doubt familiar with the fact that objects retain ineffaceable impressions of everything that has ever happened in their vicinity, that really trained clairvoyants—who are rarer than needles in haystacks, Lord knows—can re-discover the history of any article by this means. When certain circumstances, that seem mysterious at present because we don’t understand the laws that operate them, make some of these pictures visible to a sensitive, we get stories of apparitions and haunted houses.”

He paused a moment. Here was Quincy’s cue for guffawing scepticism, if he meant to try to stick to his pose of the day before, the pose that he had probably suspected that his brother was exploding for him, when he crept down the corridor. None came.

“Witch House is like a vast storehouse of film, stocked with everything that all the Quincys have ever done or felt

here. And a child, being mentally somewhat like primeval man, is likely to be a sensitive. It's not amazing therefore, that Betty-Ann should evoke some pretty terrifying images from the store here, or that her imagination should terrify her still more by trying to explain them.

"The visions of your aunt, for instance; such figures are really no more alive than those in a cinema film, but they are as powerless to change their appearance or behavior; they must follow the original line of momentum in which they were sent forth. And your aunt, I understand, deeply resented your cousin's marriage, may have resented the child, who would be of no use to the family. Her image might be one that the average adult, let alone a child, would take for a malevolent ghost."

"She'd have thoroughly enjoyed leaving behind an image of herself that could torment Betty-Ann," Joseph said quietly. "No question but she'd have prepared a pretty one, if she'd known how, if you can credit her with that much knowledge of black magic, as it's called. She had a pretty healthy hate. And she flew into a passion when she first heard that the child was born—another offense of Elizabeth's: instead of the coveted heir, the son she should have borne Quincy or me, according to Aunt Sarai's plan."

"Do you think that this astral photograph of Aunt Sarai makes itself invisible and upsets chessboards and smashes china?" Quincy inquired with a touch of mockery.

"No. I've seen telekinesis—movement of objects at a distance—practised in Malabar: intelligently and consciously. Betty-Ann is in the proper state to do it unconsciously; she's too frightened not to give herself something to be frightened of. That's a simpler and

pleasanter hypothesis to go on than suspecting Aunt Sarai's image of having acquired a non-human inhabitant."

He was watching both brothers closely as he spoke. Quincy's eyes were suddenly avid, weighing and measuring with the savage caution of an animal, his body tense.

"Telekinesis! You know that much? You actually gained access to the Masters who teach that?"

Carew laughed deprecatingly and shrugged. "I didn't learn how to do it, if that's what you mean. I'm no worker of physical miracles. I've never had much desire to be able to get my carpet slippers without walking to the closet for them. Such men are Masters of only a very small mystery; and I had time only for important things."

"Important." Quincy's wondering tone was, at first, too amazed for even scorn. "You could have had power, and you threw it away, like that?" He shrugged. "Sorry, but if I were going in for magic, I'd take up something practical. Something I could use. Telekinesis—that's a demonstrable fact the scientific mind could grasp at and learn how to do things with. But you fellows who fool with the occult always seem to get off on chimeras."

Carew said nothing. He felt the change in the atmosphere: the relaxation of tension, of keenness. As though he had been under an invisible microscope, that was now withdrawn. The respect the brothers might have felt for the sorcerer, or rather, the super-physical scientist, had faded. They thought they had taken his measure. Or Quincy did. He was as relieved as a pretty woman suddenly assured of a prospective rival's homeliness. Paradox, Carew reflected whimsically, that the Unseen should be measured only by cheap and showy effects on the Seen. But a very old

paradox: the Jews had expected their Messiah to come crowned, not crucified.

He did not waste force in resenting this opinion of himself; nor was he vain enough to be amused by it. If they chose to deceive themselves, let them; he might be able to work the more freely.

Joseph smiled with a faint fine contempt that seemed to embrace both men.

“Your usual mistake, Quincy; you’re always too preoccupied with parlor tricks. Dr. Carew doubtless understands that it’s better to study causes before consequences; the more thoroughly grounded you are in your subject, the sooner you’ll achieve skill. But I should like to know, Carew,” he went on, laughing with a gleam of amused malice, “what you’ve learned that will enable you to deal with Aunt Sarai’s ghost, automaton or not. If it was intentionally set in motion, it’s a pretty grisly practical joke, and a pretty effective one.”

“There is always the possibility,” Carew said gravely, “that your aunt knew enough to set it in motion.”

Quincy laughed. “If I were Elizabeth I shouldn’t thank either of you for that comforting diagnosis. Would it do any good to open Aunt Sarai’s grave and drive a stake through her? If you believe in as much sorcery as that, you must regret the days of witch-burners, Carew.”

Carew said quietly, “No. Witch-burners were barbarous blunderers. If I wanted to suppress a dangerous letter, could I do it by burning the envelope and leaving the letter loose? The witch would come back unchanged; I should merely have postponed the danger until another time and place. And have further handicapped myself to meet it, by

depriving the witch, by violent death, of the years allotted her, or him, for evolution."

Joseph said with dry humor, "She might not have used them for that, Carew. At least not for your idea of it."

Carew shrugged. "That would be her responsibility, not mine. And, in any case, she would be that many years nearer the time of her inevitable change."

This time Joseph did not answer, only smiled.

Nothing happened at chess that night; board and men stayed in their places. But Betty-Ann could not keep her mind on the game; her eyes kept wandering, apprehensively searching the shadows. Her eyes were like two animals in that constant, horribly wary vigilance.

Carew ignored them, played on and talked, with interest, of the game; and she tried to answer brightly, but her answers were absent-minded; she did not always look to see where she moved her men. And when she moved his knight the end came.

"I'm afraid," she said with quivering lips, "afraid of what's going to happen next. If *It* stops throwing up the board, It'll think up something else. It always has. It won't stop. It'll do something else." Her breath caught. *"Something else."*

They finished the game, but he knew that he had not scored that night.

Carew privately felt some relief the next night when the board shot into the air four times. Betty-Ann did also; she entered into the spirit of the thing and scrambled after the

chessmen with merry shrieks of laughter. Only a trained ear could have detected the hysterical note in the laughter.

He knew that Elizabeth Stone noted it when she entered. In the morning, when Betty-Ann was playing in the garden, she found an opportunity to speak with him.

“How are things going, Dr. Carew?”

And he answered frankly, “Not well yet. This hypnosis of fear is too effective. If trouble slackens in one direction, her imagination sets to work anticipating a new form of attack until matters are worse than ever. She was less frightened last night when the accidents happened than on the night before when they did not. Any known danger, even one that comes out of the Unknown, is less frightful than a completely unknown one.”

She said abruptly, with a bitter little laugh, “Sometimes I find it hard to keep from wondering the same thing myself —what the next attack will be. One can hardly keep one’s mind away from it, or stop it; it’s like taking a drug. Don’t you feel it, Dr. Carew?”

He admitted that he did.

Their eyes met; but after a moment he smiled determinedly across the gulf of darkness that look acknowledged and divined.

“But I don’t let myself do it. If we do, we weaken ourselves to meet it when it comes and we only generate more fear and excitement around her.”

She said with a catch in her breath, “Then you think it will come?”

“I’m afraid that’s inevitable. One must admit a certain intelligence in the campaign. The foiling of every one of your precautions at each separate stage of the game, for

instance. Now I am to be foiled—my presence is to be made to make things worse, if possible."

Her mind was lightning-quick; she pounced upon his meaning with cat-like swiftness.

"You mean that something wants to make me send you away—leave her altogether at its mercy?"

"I am guessing; but I should say that the time may come when that will seem wisest to you."

Her eyes probed his face, keen as lancets.

"And you? Do you think I should tell you to go or stay?"

He laughed. "I'm not showing the white feather, if that's what you mean. I think the end is certain if I go, but I'm only a man; I cannot absolutely guarantee good results if I stay. And there may be a time when you will be desperate enough to do anything to gain a respite. The decision is yours to make; I am merely giving you a warning, so that you will not be taken by surprise."

She flung her head back. The lights flashed and flickered in her dark eyes, steadied into steel.

"In a gamble between hope and a certainty—a certainty we won't name; I can't do anything but choose the hope. And I won't throw down my cards."

It was a flash of the courage that had once cut sword-like through the dark webs of Witch House, the courage that had once slashed her own way to freedom, and might yet clear her child's, and something elemental in the man's blood leaped to it, fire recognizing the swift bright warmth of fire. His hand closed over hers, swift and strong; there was comradeship in the clasp, the comradeship a man might have given a man, but a more electric thing also. Man's hand and woman's hand—the ancient potion, primal and strong. Fire, the brilliant and incalculable, leaped out

for a second to menace the grey cloudy daylight pattern of Witch House; sank again.

On the third night no game was possible at all. Board and chessmen bounded into the air as fast as they could be assembled or re-assembled. There was something demoniac in those fierce, continual springs, an energy that was like an exultant savagery. The room rang with its reiterated crashings; Betty-Ann grew white.

“You see it won’t stop, Gay—it won’t! It only makes it madder when we laugh and don’t pay any attention to it!”

“Naturally; but it will tire of that presently. I thought we had agreed not to encourage it by getting excited about it.”

His voice was as calm, as cooling, as cold still water; and she stared at him with a kind of miserable wonder. How could he not see, not feel, the dreadfulness? He was not like other grown-ups; he knew that she did not throw the chessmen down: that *something else* did, and so, what Awfulness was real.

But he wasn’t afraid. Almost, for half a second, that bewildering knowledge opened a tiny window high up in the dark locked room of her terror. He was not afraid—and grown people were cleverer than children; they would be afraid of great danger once they knew it was real.

But he hadn’t seen what she had. He hadn’t seen William Tell and the kitten, that cuddly, soft thing, all cut and red. Aunt Sarai hadn’t looked at him, hating him, coming to life because she hated him, there in her frame.

The window closed again.

Carew picked her up. Two days ago she would have stiffened like an animal had anyone taken such a liberty, but now she clung to him, trusting him. Warm strong arms about her were a comfort in that room of horribly moving

things; his were so strong that it felt as if nothing could tear her out of them, as she was sometimes afraid, when she lay awake in the dark, that *something* would come and tear her out of her mother's.

Carew sat down with her and told her a story: a fairy tale about an Eastern princess, exciting, for no tepid food would have held her mind then, but carefully devoid of all brutality, and glamorously full of the glowing jewels and bright silks and tall elephants of Rajput kings. Of Kashmir shawls so fine they can be drawn through a ring; of rubies and emeralds and diamonds, and the jeweled swords of princes. His voice, rainbow-colored, gilded all; her imagination, the potent tool, moved under his hand instead of under that Unseen Dark One.

Carew knew, as well as his invisible antagonist, the uses of imagination, its indestructible strength, and its impartiality as the servant of good or evil. And when Betty-Ann was thoroughly absorbed, the glowing descriptions began gradually to repeat themselves, with the harmonious monotony of falling water. Her eyes grew heavy.

Palliative, he thought grimly, later, when he had left her, half-asleep, with her mother. But he could do little except palliate unless he could stop the fear-producing phenomena.

And how to stop it? That question clamored at him with many voices. It asked itself in the creak of a board under his foot, in the opening and closing of a door, in the mouthless queerly vigilant shadows that waited for him in his room, put black arms around him as he entered. It asked itself with such unanswerable and mocking insistence that he had to close his inner ears to it, with a steel clamping of his will.

Not easy to fight with an enemy that was nowhere but everywhere, that filled the very air you breathed, black and heavy and passionless, trying to creep into your mind as softly and quietly as the breath entered your lungs. Doubtless that same process had corrupted the earlier Quincys: their natures already psychic breeding-grounds for the evil that desired them. No wonder those of them who resisted had been narrower, more savage, than those who had, in some measure, given way.

Nothing desired him. But there might be an intention to confuse and weaken him, render him impotent. Even attempts to think what that next move might be, how to prepare for it, were dangerous; created an opening through his imagination. He laughed grimly: best if the intention should turn upon himself—he could meet and face it on that ground.

For that there was a planned and still planning intention, he knew. Reason, as well as his partially developed sixth and seventh senses, served him there. The diagnosis he had given Elizabeth, and later the brothers, had not been a full one. Betty-Ann's self-hypnosis of fear was a state into which she had been goaded, a weapon that was being carefully used against her.

Her dreams of a garden on the other side of the moon were not subjective images of her own fancies; they had been sent into her mind from without. They fitted the old formula of bewitched children to whom the witches sent imps and fairies to torment them and to entice them, with alluring sights and promises, to sign away their souls and become witches in their turn.

Stories not included in a child's reading. . . .

And Betty-Ann was witch-born: to the mediaeval mind sure damnation.

But the ancient pattern was not merely re-enacting itself, forced upon a sensitive mind by the mischievous sub-human entities such evilly impregnated walls might attract; it had fresh resource, fresh invention behind it—the deliberate, calculating intelligence that had checkmated Elizabeth's every effort.

That was the most darkly undeniable thing: the intelligence. It veiled itself behind spasmodic and capricious activity, playing with its victim like a cat with a mouse, but it was there. He knew it as surely as his trained senses would have discovered a hidden watcher by the feel of conscious intelligent eyes upon him.

But though the watcher was here, no physical body was. There was nothing to seize.

The pattern had been cleverly modernized. If Betty-Ann had been made physically ill, had vomited pins and needles, as to the bafflement of modern science, many credible witnesses in old witch-trials actually testified that the afflicted children did, too much interest would have been aroused; doctors would have been eager to study the phenomena. The Satanic cunning of the whole attack lay in doing nothing that could not be set down to accident or the child's own fault. A careful precaution that revealed reasoning intelligence, not mere blind and half-ensouled hate, in the attacker.

Before he had come to Witch House he had suspected Quincy Lee—the easy, least uncommon solution. The perverted mind that could undertake marriage for the sake of making hypnotic experiments on a neurotic woman might have been cruel enough to see fresh material in the

sensitive and highly suggestible mind of a growing child. He could have found an opportunity to mesmerize her, give instructions and plant suggestions that her waking mind could not remember but must act upon all the same. Telekinesis might be possible to him; the forces in Witch House, even when operated by a low-grade manipulator, would be potent: masters as well as servants.

“Let a fool loose in a power-room, and he might pull switches enough to get some startling results. A fool or a monkey: stupid, mischievous and cunning.”

And such devilish and cruel mischief would have explained Quincy’s attitude also: his rather compromising efforts to prejudice Carew’s mind before his cousin had had time to state her case. Double dread could have dictated them: fear of exposure, and fear of losing his prey.

“Hard enough not to kick him that first evening,” Carew reflected, “and if it had turned out as I suspected, I might have. It would have been about the only way, and not a very disagreeable one under the circumstances, to scare him off.”

But the hare at the window had been a phenomenon beyond Quincy’s making.

There had been the Adversary’s one slip. He had seen one face of the Faceless, met for an instant those malignant eyes, and felt the chill of a region Quincy could never move or master.

On the fourth day the rain began again; fell with steady, slithering softness, all day long.

The hours passed. Cheerfully, uneventfully, Elizabeth and Betty-Ann and Carew sat around the fire in a brilliantly lighted room. In the afternoon there was a game with quiet chessmen on an unmoving board. No danger by day, but the

peaceful game weakened the horror associated with the chessmen, the intense fear-vibration that would be provocative at night.

And though there were four or five overturnings of the board that night, there was no repetition of the demoniac energy. Betty-Ann did not give way to fright; by intervals she was interested in the game.

The fifth day found her seeing the world in slightly different colors. Gay was a very interesting friend; she called him Gay altogether now: Carew ordinarily valued the title of doctor for psychological reasons, but here, where doctors, too, had come to be classed as enemies, it seemed best to depend on his personality, to let the direct warmth of it flow all through the situation, a new factor and, in its way, a new force.

It had power. Betty-Ann's sense of strife, her dislike of people, waned; she felt in harmony with her world again, no longer a madly protesting, separate, small discord. Her cousins, who had been images of stinging fire in her mind, faded to unfriendly masks. She had never liked them anyway, and she did not have to see them much.

After all, nothing very dreadful really happened in the evenings. What if the board did upset a few times if nobody were angry or accused her of it? It didn't hurt her. And Gay did not see anything to be afraid of in it—he laughed. Not at her, for being afraid, but at the board's antics. Sometimes it did seem rather silly of *something* to keep on throwing the board around.

The sixth day found Aunt Sarai and William Tell and the kitten seeming farther off. She was still afraid, but she thought about fear less often. She was used to living under thick black clouds, and now she was no longer keeping the

neck of her mind craned to peer at them. The world looked more normal than it might have done had she been dazzled by the sudden complete uplifting of fear.

Everything seemed different now that Gay was here. His strength was like the sun; it gave her something else to look at, something different from the cold, horrible strength of dead people. He was the most interesting person in the world, warm and glamorous and a friend.

The change was not commented on before her; but Elizabeth spoke of it to Carew on that sixth evening, after the child was in her room asleep, with a lighted lamp to keep guard.

Carew said quietly, “Don’t thank me yet. It has been too easy.”

He heard a little catch in her breath, but the eyes that met his were still courageous, level as a sword’s point.

“You mean this may be a lull before the storm?”

“Possibly. I’m afraid, probably. If her own imagination were Our enemy, instead of merely being held in its bondage, the crucial point would be well past. As it is, I’ve stolen the enemy’s thunder; it can’t accomplish much when accidents cause no ructions. When she doesn’t have to defend herself and no fuss is made about them the phenomena begin to lose their dignity. It’s like showing up a bully—calling his bluff.”

“I know. When we were children, Joseph used to delight in showing up Quincy. And I delighted in seeing him do it. Not so good for Quincy, perhaps; I can see now that one of his reasons for bullying was his constant feeling that Joseph was cleverer—but he was very irritating, and we were only children; we didn’t realize. But Witch House is different. You think,” with a sudden change to deadly

seriousness, “that it won’t rest on this: that it will change the phenomena?”

“Yes; and the sooner the better.” He smiled at her wryly, whimsically. “I don’t want to shock you; I know you’d be glad of a longer respite for her. But we can’t pride ourselves on having made any real gains until we know what we have to face.”

“I know. I can’t imagine Witch House giving up so easily. But there *is* gain; I know what you’ve already done for her.” She smiled at him, and for a second that mutual smile united them, enclosed them, alone together in some space as private as a garden where apples grew in the world’s dawn, an island glowing with unknown fruits and flowers, in the drab universe of being.

It passed. They were still together, body with body, but each mind alone with itself, back in the age-long isolation, the terrible separateness of humankind. He bent and stirred the fire, and his smile had lost its detached, half-humorous melancholy, and her face had a little more color than the red firelight gave.

She went on evenly, “For you have changed her, Dr. Carew. Not only no more pulling the blinds up and down, or watching the windows at night. No more watching people either, like a little wild animal that’s so frightened it’s furious and wants to snap. It frightened me sometimes—that sheer hate. It was so unlike her, and it was growing all the time. She was never even sorry for biting Joseph, except for her own sake, because it was a cheap thing to do, although she apologized to him when I told her to.”

“Because the whole world, except you, deserved biting?” Carew laughed. “I saw she carried that resentment of people farther than was normal, even though temper is a

pretty natural reaction to fright and strain. But hers wasn't altogether self-generating. If you'll notice, it is very easy to hate in Witch House. There's a heat in the air—using the word figuratively—that encourages it."

She shot him a quick, half-frightened glance as she leaned forward and watched the fire that did its red dance and hissed its small song of destruction as it ate into the wood upon the hearth.

"I know. I could have killed Quincy that day I struck him in the library when he had hold of Betty-Ann. Not just have thought about it—have killed him. Oh, my brain would have controlled my hand, even if there'd been a knife in it, but the wish was there. You're right, though I never thought of it in just that way before. There is something here that enflames malice—not just fear. When the three of us were children and quarrelled, we used to do things to one another that I'm ashamed to think of now."

Carew, remembering Quincy's snarling savagery and Joseph's cold, ruthless teasing, that would never lack resource to retaliate, thought that that was easily envisioned. There might well have been brutal storms between those three young wild creatures, with no law to look to but Aunt Sarai's, no example set them but violence and cruelty. Yet within the girl there had been some self-lit light that had made her separate, burned her into fighting free.

And he wondered again what she had been like, the girl Elizabeth who had run away. They were a riddle he could not read: *Elizabeth and Hugh Stone. Elizabeth and Hugh Stone!*

But they were not his business. Their child was. He shrugged inwardly.

“This is a place where you have to be careful what you feel: to guard your moods with more than ordinary watchfulness. Betty-Ann is not very fertile ground for the seed or she’d have been harder to deal with.”

“She was not hard for you to deal with.” Her smile flashed upon him again, warm and bright. “I wouldn’t have believed, adaptable as children are, that in so short a time she could be so different, so natural again.”

He laughed. “That was mainly a question of not getting excited. Anyone who suspected or ridiculed her could only have made matters worse—poured oil on the flames. Anyone who shared her fears would have pleased her infinitely better, but have been equally bad for her. I did not contribute to the contagion in any way; I went along as if things were normal. Also I’m a novelty, and youngsters like novelties.”

“They do. But she likes you better than that. You know it; you planned it so.” She was looking straight at him; she was like some still and lovely picture with her dark eyes fathomless in her white face. Something moved about her, something tempted and troubled, a confused heat, a whirl of speculation, scruple, denied desire. But for all his training he could not read her thoughts any more than if she had been a picture.

“There’s only one force that’s strong enough to conquer those in Witch House, and you know how to manipulate it; you turned one current off and the other on. It was the very best kind of distraction.”

He said, “Love always is.”

“Love?” In the air between them the word changed color, swelled and reshaped and hung there, a shining and unfamiliar thing. Strange hues and strange fragrances

might come from it; now it was only metamorphosed, queerly alarming.

She said again, lips half-curving, half-curling, “Love. What is the real meaning of that, I wonder? To have—and have—and mold—and tear. Even with children we want to press their lives into molds we make. I’m afraid we Quincys generally use it to bait a trap with. It built Witch House—that poor first Elizabeth’s love for that first Joseph.

“I’ve often wondered, how much did she love him—the real him? Did anything in her ever cry out in answer to the truth of him, to the horrors and the powers he showed her? Unluckier for her if it did, if she had that to fight as well as him. She would have thought it meant hell-fire and damnation; she would have prayed to her God to help her so that He Himself would not have to burn her forever and ever. A God too much like Joseph to help. Not much choice between God and the devil in those days—except that God’s was supposed to be the winning side.”

“The damnation,” Carew said, “would not have needed hell-fire or a God to make it real enough.”

On the seventh night the chessboard flew into the air only once.

But as Carew went upstairs that night he knew that it was his turn to be apprehensive, as Betty-Ann had been apprehensive on that one night of utter stillness. Fear slid round and through and over his mind like the cold coils of a snake. Suppose this should be the next move? Utter passivity, utter stillness, until his own going, and then horror springing back, like a released spring, upon the again defenseless child?

The Adversary’s wisest move, the one he could not counter.

Self-doubt: the undermining of a man: rats gnawing at the hard oak of his will. *“Suppose I cannot help? Suppose I cannot see my way in time? I too am mortal, if I can be blinded, misled—?”*

Not the first time he had had to crush down those whispers, nor the twenty-first. He had learned through long hard schooling to pick and choose his emotions, not to waste force in worry and brooding, futile states of mind that might blur his vision or impair his efficiency. Worry and improper thinking are luxuries as dangerous as drink. But here his self-mastery was tested as never before. Not for many minutes at a time; he could see to that; but the constant vigilance, the effort necessary to throw off the dark vapors, made inroads, however slight, upon his strength.

They were strong with the strength of centuries, these traps and snares of fear and rancor and depression that stuck to one’s feet like a kind of spiritual mud in Witch House. How many souls long disembodied had shaped them, as unconsciously as the mother shapes the body of the unborn child, in their frenzy and their writhings, or their numb despair?

It took him the space of time consumed in passing from the foot to the head of the stairs to regain his calm, free his mind utterly from the cold coils. But he was entirely himself when he reached his room and undressed for bed.

Twice or thrice during that week, as he was falling asleep, his mind and will relaxing into oblivion, images had come before him in the dark, dreams moving like dim motionpictures upon the screen of his fading consciousness.

Images of himself coming up against a blank wall and trying to climb it, but finding it too slippery to give finger- or toehold, clutching, scrabbling, always falling back again. A wall that loomed over him, shutting out light and breath. He had had to wake himself and give his mind the command to sink into peaceful sleep.

But tonight he slept at once and soundly, with no prologue of unpleasant visions. The victory he had won on the stairs seemed to have served him well.

In the middle of the night he woke suddenly and sharply, with an almost instantaneous return to full consciousness. A thin starved ray of moonlight had crept in and lay gleaming across the bed. He thought its light must have awakened him, and lay for a second watching it, wide awake but still too relaxed from sleep to rise immediately and draw the shade.

And it dawned upon him that he was heavy with a vast depression, crushed beneath it as beneath a thousand-ton weight. *What was the use?* What could he accomplish here? The Adversary had only to wait until he left and then begin again. He could come back, but it would be harder to help Betty-Ann a second time. And there could be a third time, and a fourth, and a fifth. A dozen or a hundred times. Always the Adversary could bide Its time and he could never meet it, never force Its hand.

How could a man face the Faceless, a mere student of the White, with many mysteries yet unfathomed, overcome the skilled and ancient, discarnate Black? He could set his will, yes. He could save himself, yes. But it was not he who was attacked. The child had no trained will to set; her imagination was already mastered, and her slight strength her enemy’s servant, not hers. For every good suggestion

that he could plant in her mind, a dark, offsetting suggestion could be planted by this other force that filled the very air she breathed.

Why bring more torture down on her? Why, by parrying one type of onslaught, invite fresh blows to fall and rock her bewildered, half-crazed little brain? As one had fallen in the touch of Aunt Sarai's spectral hand in that California hotel where Elizabeth had plotted defiance. His own presence could only bring on the new and worse horrors that became a permanent fixture after every struggle. He might conquer them while he was there, but they would only fall back a step, lying in wait for his departure, as Aunt Sarai's pictured figure had seemed to recoil into the canvas.

"Best to go—to go at once, before I make things worse." He found himself uttering the words aloud. The sick inundation of hopelessness and shame flowed over him like a physical agony. All he wanted was escape, flight from the scene of his helplessness, of his powerlessness to help. It seemed too bitter, too utterly degrading, like the defeat of all mankind. And pity still tore him with a hundred claws.

"I cannot help. I could not help her if there were a chance. Not with this in my heart. I did not know there was such a mood left in me, such utter giving way. Have I been so mistaken in myself?"

It stabbed through him like a sudden flash of light: *The mood that filled him was not self-generated.* He was the battery that was being charged with an electric current that Another had turned on.

It was a stiff fight for a while. He had been so completely caught by the glamor, not realizing that his thoughts did not proceed from his own brain, that he was like a

swimmer struggling among great waves; he had to lift himself up out of the hopelessness and conviction of doom as if they had been the weight of mighty waters. But he did pull up out of them, his soul shaking itself as a wet dog shakes its fur free of drops.

“Damn logic! Damn danger and odds and additional risks for her! I must do my work and I can do it. Only myself can defeat myself.”

He understood now. He had never fallen into snares of old stored emotions, though these might have been used as arrows to send against him. His subconsciousness had never played traitor to his conscious will, shaping fear- and failure-pictures to torment him as he fell asleep.

All had been a planned campaign, a subtle, stealthy whittling at his mind and will.

But it would not work again. He knew that with a cold and sure certainty very different from another man’s emotional triumph. If it were tried again he would be ready and on his guard. And immeasurably stronger for this success.

“Only a fool is humiliated by having been weak enough to have to overcome obstacles. And I am glad—it proves that something is anxious to get me out of the house. Witch House is afraid to play a waiting game. *Why?”*

He rose and went to the window. As he drew the shade he remembered that it had been down when he had gone to bed.

“The light was used to wake me. Something paid me the compliment of fearing that if I woke without reason I might suspect and escape the trap. Very subtle; but subtlety is not quite enough. It is baffled, and in some degree afraid now, wherever and whatever it is.”

As he went back to bed he had the usual sense of unseen eyes upon him, but they did not trouble him. He fell asleep serenely, and the shade did not rise again as it had before, quietly, untouched by human hands, too softly and stealthily for its noise to startle a sleeper and put him on his guard. Witch House, too, knew better than to waste its force.

Two more too-peaceful days, their very quiet eloquent of the calculated waiting of the Incalculable, and then the blow fell.

III

“Dr. Carew! Dr. Carew!” Gaylord Carew was roused by that crying and by a knocking, fierce and frantic, on his door—Elizabeth’s voice, wild with a passionate terror he had never heard in it.

Springing up sharply out of the cool depths of sleep, he called, “Coming!” and voice and knocking ceased.

He pulled on his dressing-gown, unlocked his door and stepped out into that sudden silence. Elizabeth stood there, slim and bright as a flame in her long robe of some red stuff, her face above it white and set as a dead woman’s. He saw in the awful misery in her dark eyes the stamp and seal of Witch House, akin to its own shadows.

He asked quickly, “Betty-Ann?”

She said tonelessly, “If the ceilings weren’t so thick you could hear her crying and screaming down there. I wonder you don’t anyhow. I left Mabel with her; Mabel won’t stay here another night. It’s true that we can’t keep servants long in Witch House.”

“Another nightmare?”

“I don’t know. I could swear she hasn’t been out of bed. But she thinks she has. And her left arm is black and blue from shoulder to elbow. It’s the first time,” she bit her lips savagely, shuddering, as her voice broke, “that anything has hurt her—actually *hurt* her!”

He asked quietly, “Why did you call the maid first instead of me?”

“Because,” the steadiness for which she was fighting (she could not achieve calm), was breaking, crumbling under the effort of her words; she threw out her hands in a pitiful gesture, “the idea of your coming almost drives her into convulsions. She’s beside herself. She keeps crying that you must go away at once. That the hare’s angry because you are here; that that’s why It came and took her out of bed last night. She’s sure that if you stay, something horrible will happen.”

“And you? The game seems fairly obvious.”

He was looking straight into her eyes, and she quivered, threw back her head. He was reminded fantastically of a slim white ship swept by roaring seas, rocking and all but capsized, held from that yawning maw of waters only by one pair of desperate, steadfast human hands at the wheel.

“I’ve known it was either her sanity or her life if things went on like this. I know your staying is her only chance. Such chance as she has, poor baby! And yet—those bruises on her arm! I had never thought of that. They drive me mad too. If I hadn’t come up to you at once I should have given up, sent you word to go. But perhaps it will be better for her, whatever comes, than to die slowly, worried to death by inches. I must face it even if I can’t.”

“Don’t think about catastrophe!” His voice, completely passionless, had suddenly the sharp white crackle of electricity. “Don’t let your mind draw pictures of it! Think only of fighting for her—of the need of the moment! Remember always that we *can* pull her through; only our own weakness can let catastrophe come.”

“I wonder. I can only not give up.”

Dawn was breaking now: the sickly dawn of a sunless day, beginning to reach through the windows with grey and

ghostly fingers into the dark. When Elizabeth and Carew reached the stairhead he turned and spoke.

"Will you let me handle this in my own way? Not try to quiet her?"

She laughed drearily. "If I can help it, Dr. Carew. I don't know what will happen. I'm afraid she'll go mad at the sight of you, as she did that time when she scratched me and bit Joseph."

The sound of screams began to reach them as she spoke, wailing screams of rage and misery, on a note that did indeed have madness in it. In the darkness of the stairs it sounded like the crying of a soul in hell; and Carew saw Elizabeth's drawn face twitch a little, then grow more than ever still.

The rooms below were a blaze of light and a white-faced, scared-eyed servant girl came running in.

"Thank the Lord you've come! It's enough to drive a person crazy listening to it, even without knowing what done it—she's that marked!"

"Go and get some warm water." Carew's clear, decisive voice cut across hers. She went, gladly.

In the bedroom Betty-Ann was sitting up in bed, rigid. The screams rose into a horrible howling wail, no longer human, but animal, as she saw him.

"Oh, Mother, I told you, I told you, not to bring him! You know it'll make them madder. They'll get me! Oh!"

Carew started towards the bed. She beat the covers with her fists and screamed at him.

"Don't! Don't come near me! You only make it worse. I don't want to see you ever again! I hate you!" She began to cry suddenly, tears squeezing out on the small, writhing face. "No, I don't either. I do love you, Gay. I know you only

want to help. But you can't—you only make *them* madder. Oh, please, please, go away!"

"Doesn't it occur to you that they must be pretty well afraid of me to be so wild for me to go?" Carew's calm voice had a hint of dry humor in it, but she screamed again.

"They'll get me! They'll get me! You haven't any right to stay here and make them get me! It's wicked! Oh-h. . . . . ."

It was a wail of intolerable anguish.

"I shan't let them, Betty-Ann." His voice was very gentle, and she began to cry again, sobbing hopelessly and hysterically.

"But you can't keep them from it! They'll come when you aren't here! Oh, please, please!" He was nearing the bed now and she began to tremble, staring at him strangely, her eyes glowing like an animal's, her fingers working. "Don't come any closer. I hate for you to think I'm awful, but I can't help it. I'll bite you! I'll bite you!"

He laughed. "It won't much matter if you do. I shan't be angry. But you don't have to do anything you don't want to do, Betty-Ann. Nothing else can use your arms and legs and teeth in spite of you. Not if you tell them to stop."

He sat down on the edge of the bed. She started, flash-quick, to whirl towards him, then turned as quickly, flung herself face-downward into the pillows, biting them with white, frantic little teeth, and writhed there, screaming and sobbing.

"Oh, why won't you let me alone? It's all no use!"

"It is use. Will you stop screaming and tell me what has happened? I don't even know. You can do it if you try to; nothing can stop you. And I shall stay here until you do."

The screams went on for a few moments longer. Then she said gaspingly, “Will you go away and leave me alone if I do?”

“I’ll leave the room as soon as I’ve got you ready to go back to sleep. I can’t promise more than that; I want you to get well.”

He was immovable as a stone wall; he was calm as a stone wall. Any nervousness or irritation in him, any private, egoistic satisfaction in his own firmness, however carefully hidden, would have reached her finer senses and stimulated her to fresh heights of frenzy that only exhaustion or violence could have stilled. But he gave no food to frenzy. He was not nervous or angry. He could sit there, calm and quiet as he was now, neither fighting nor giving way, and listen to screams for far longer than she could keep them up. He could not be worn out.

She could not make him angry, and she could not keep on making herself angry, not in the face of that steady, rock-like power. You cannot hurt rock, and it cannot want to hurt you.

It was no use. And she cared intensely what he thought of her.

“I can’t get well, Gay; I’m not sick. But something will get me; it’s been after me for a long time and you’ll make it get me if you stay. See what it did to me.” She pulled down her pajama-jacket from the shoulder; the flesh beneath showed no longer white, but greenish-yellow, shot with purple. “It was the hare; he came back last night, Gay. He came right into the room!”

“Was the window open?”

“No, it wasn’t. It doesn’t have to be.” Her eyes widened in a sudden fresh dilation of horror. “He can go through

things.

“I went to sleep just like usual and all of a sudden in the middle of the night I woke up. And there *he* was; he was sitting by the foot of the bed, not three feet away from me.” She shuddered violently, her lips quivering. “It was moonlight, and I could see him so plain, how big and black he was. He was looking at me, and his eyes were all big and green, and they had a kind of red shine in them. And I knew that if I tried to call out and wake up mother he’d bite me awfully; his mouth was a little open so I could see his teeth.”

She shuddered again. Carew poured a little water from the thermos on the night-table and gave it to her, slipping his arm under her. He did not take the arm away, and she rested upon it, a little of the stiffness going out of the small body that was so warmly, strongly circled.

“It was *so* awful! And he kept on looking at me and I knew I must get out of bed or he’d come and touch me. I did, too, but when I got out I wasn’t me—I was a little white bunny. And he started out of the room and I had to go with him for fear he’d touch me. It felt so horrid, going out with him and looking back at mother there asleep.

“We went into the main part of the house, and one of the big front doors was open, and we went out through it. And then he gave a big jump, and so did I, and it took us clear up into the sky. We couldn’t fly, but we kept jumping and jumping.

“Sometimes we stayed in the sky a little while, jumping from cloud to cloud, and the moon would get closer and closer and bigger and bigger, and its face would change and get horrible and grin at us until it seemed like its mouth was a mile wide and open, to swallow us up. And

then we'd come down again and jump from one cliff to another, and the sea would be roaring down under us, and the waves all grey and cold and moving around and boiling like they were mad or afraid.

"We went all over the island and sometimes we jumped over the sea to the mainland and back again; and sometimes I tried to get away and run back to mother—I thought she'd know me even if I was a bunny—but always, whichever way I turned, the hare was there in front of me, and his teeth were shining.

"We kept it up all night, and I was so tired and cold and miserable, and so scared. I didn't know whether he would ever let me go home or whether he would take me to Aunt Sarai. Then finally I did get away and the hare *chased* me!"

She broke off, her voice rising again to a wail.

"It was so awful! I ran all over the island, into all sorts of queer little places that I never knew were there before—it seems so different after dark—and finally, when two or three times I'd been so tired that I thought I just couldn't go any farther, before *he* caught me, I saw the house in front of me and the front door still open and I started to run in, and then I thought—what if they'd planned it that way, and Aunt Sarai had come down from her portrait and was inside there in the dark, waiting for me?

"I jumped up onto the roof and the hare jumped after me and I jumped down the chimney here. I thought I'd sooner fall into the fire than have him get me! But the fire was out, and I came down through the chimney slaunchwise, and only fell on one paw awfully hard, so that I fainted. And when I came to I was in bed and I was just me, not a bunny any more. And it wasn't a nightmare, it was real. Look at my arm!"

“It was a nightmare, Betty.” Carew’s voice, calm, tender, undisturbed, poured over her frenzied, jangling nerves like honey. “Most people would say that you struck your arm against the head of the bed; I think you found it bruised because you were sure it would be. We’ve done that in hospitals, we doctors—told hypnotized people to expect bruises and when they woke up they found them, though nothing had touched them. This is the same thing.”

“No, it wasn’t; it was real! You’re only making that up—trying to make me think it wasn’t.”

“How do you think you got back into bed and out of the fireplace while you were unconscious, then? And I never make things up. I’ve always told you the absolute truth and I always will. Will you get me that warm water, please, Mrs. Stone? Mabel can go now. Betty-Ann, let me help you get this off.”

He was lifting her, pulling the pajama-jacket over her head to bare the bruised arm, but she struggled.

“It was true, it *was!* Oh, Gay, you know *I* wouldn’t want you to go—I like you so much—but I’m so scared! It was only the hare this time, and he was horrible, but it will be Aunt Sarai next time! She’ll get me!”

“She will not! I’ll see to that.” His tone had a grim and absolute firmness. “Lie still and let me get at this arm. Did the hare tell you all these interesting things?”

Her eyes contracted a moment, bewildered.

“No. It didn’t say anything. But I knew what it was thinking, whenever it wanted me to.”

“Whenever it wanted you to believe something, you mean. Look at me, Betty-Ann!” The command was abrupt, electric. His eyes caught hers and held them. “You are going to sleep now, and when you wake up there will be no

more bruises on your arm! You'll know by that whether you really went out with the hare or not."

He was bathing her arm now, and the feel of the warm water, and of the long, soft movements of his hands, was very soothing. And his eyes would not let hers go. She fought against a creeping lassitude; protested, "But they *are* there, Gay! Big bruises couldn't go away so soon."

"They will. Only your imagination made them. Go to sleep." He repeated the command. "Go *to sleep."*

He was looking very straight into her eyes and under that look the blue eyes slowly closed. He glanced across at the clock on Elizabeth's dressing-table. Half-past four.

"You will sleep until noon," he said quietly, "and when you wake up you will be thoroughly rested and there will be no bruises on your arm. Do you understand me?"

"Yes." The small soft voice was tranquil, expressionless. Elizabeth caught her breath sharply and came nearer to the bed. "I will sleep until noon and I will wake up thoroughly rested with no bruises on my arm."

"Did anyone ever put you to sleep like this before?" He waited a little tensely for the answer to that question, but it came readily enough, from the depths that could shape no falsehood.

"No."

"No one ever told you anything about Aunt Sarai or a hare, anything that might have frightened you, that your mother did not know of?"

"No one, ever."

"And you never left your bed last night?" This time there was uncertainty.

"No. I didn't. But I didn't, all of me, stay in it, some way."

“Very well. After this all of you will; you will not dream at night. You will go to sleep early and nothing will wake you up or reach you; whatever comes into the room you will sleep soundly, without dreaming.”

She repeated the instructions after him, still in that feelingless, toneless little voice.

He rose and tucked her in, drawing the covers over the small breast and shoulders. Elizabeth looked at him and opened her lips to speak, then broke off sharply.

Carew, following her eyes to the door, saw a watcher he had been too absorbed to become aware of, a quiet figure in whose absolutely emotionless vigilance there was little to give warning of his presence.

Joseph Quincy laughed and advanced into the room.

“Sorry if I startled you. I’d have come in sooner if I hadn’t been afraid of disturbing you.”

Elizabeth said sharply, “Lower, Joseph! You’ll waken her.”

“Not from this kind of sleep,” Carew said quietly. “Did our commotion waken you, Quincy?”

“No. I heard Mabel scurrying about and she told me a fantastic tale. So I came to see if there was anything I could do. But, as usual, I wasn’t needed. I know what you mean by ‘that kind of sleep,’ Carew.” He flicked an ironic smile of mischief over Elizabeth’s face. “Hypnosis is a treatment my cousin has always been singularly unwilling to have tried, though I’ve told her it would be by far the best way. I know a little about it myself—enough to have made the child sleep of nights.”

Elizabeth said coolly and clearly, her voice level, “When you do anything for one, your prices are always too high, Joseph. And you never tell what they will be beforehand. I prefer paying Dr. Carew’s bill.”

“And it will be one, considering all the time you’ve kept him from his patients!” Joseph murmured with a wry quirk of a smile. “But,” his tone suddenly sober, “I don’t think you need worry about my prices, Elizabeth; I have never been able to collect them from you.”

His eyes held hers a moment. She drew them away swiftly.

“I’m sorry, Joseph. I am unstrung. You have not; that is true. But it surprised me when I saw that door opening just as Dr. Carew got up.”

“I should have knocked. I’m sorry, Bess.” It was a little name out of childhood days, Carew saw; and a queer dark beauty warmed the man’s face as he spoke it.

And Carew thought with wonder, “I do not like it. Why is this dislike so strong?”

Aloud he said, “I didn’t use hypnosis to master her. I enlisted her own will to quiet her. It’s always best to let a child, or a person of any age, regain self-control, if possible, instead of being controlled from outside. But this was a necessary precaution to guard against more night-attacks.”

“Night-attacks? You gave her some kind of instructions about future nights?” There was interest in Joseph’s voice.

“Yes,” Carew said coolly, “I did.”

Elizabeth said quietly, “It will be nearer Heaven than anything that has ever been in Witch House if they work.”

When Betty-Ann woke at noon there was color in her face and her eyes were bright. She stared wonderingly at an arm that was white and unmarred as when she had fallen asleep the evening before, unmarked by the faintest tell-tale shadow of a bruise.

More days, a necklace of days, clear crystals threaded with ebon beads of night. Spring came slowly, like some

wan and beautiful woman rising from a sick-bed in a chamber that still smelled of death. The little island in the grey sea waited, waited. For what it waited, it alone could tell.

Carew could not, in those marching days of spring. He too waited, quietly alert.

But nothing happened. He and Elizabeth Stone walked on the grey cliffs or the white seashores, and Betty-Ann walked with them, or ran on before them, trying to catch up with a wave or find a green bud beginning on a bush.

Sometimes at night a dish still fell or the chessmen would fly across the floor, always with a startling, vicious suddenness; but this did not happen often, and made no stir when it did; it was turned off quietly, with a laugh.

“It’s a little like a chicken flopping after its head has been cut off,” Elizabeth told Carew once. “A kind of final, futile violence before everything subsides.”

Gaylord Carew glanced at her oddly.

“You think so? This is an old, old chicken.”

She glanced back over her shoulder then. They were out-of-doors, and the house behind them did indeed cast a long black shadow, as of dark wings brooding through the centuries over unfathomable eggs, setting in a mold of poison and corruption all the life over which they hovered. She looked, and looked back at the man beside her, and her eyes darkened with a strange speculation. Both knew that before very long now he must go.

But the knowledge no longer moved him to doubt or despair. There were still times when he felt the dark nets creeping about his soul, but knowing they were sent for a purpose he could always and easily repell them. Resolution, he felt, was a weapon against which the evil in Witch House

could not stand. So long as it was pure and unselfish resolution, untainted by any baser passion through which the pure evil without could enter and take the fortress.

His own fortress was secure; he was building a strong one in Elizabeth's and Betty-Ann's minds. He had pierced the very heart of fear and something told him that Witch House would no longer rest content with his mere going. It must answer his challenge: risk even ultimate and unavoidable defeat sooner than make the all-shattering admission that there could be strength greater than its own.

In two people there had been important changes since his coming. One was Quincy Lee.

There was a dark red cloud about the man. Some sullen flame gnawed him: a brooding anger and gloom that burned him unceasingly and hung about him like sulphurous flames. He had taken to avoiding Carew; leaving every room as soon as might be if he entered it: as though in fear that his thoughts might be read and his secret known. He kept religiously to his own quarters, and never breakfasted until noon or early afternoon, claiming that he was putting in long hours of study, though no light ever burned late in the west wing.

"My brother keeps cat's hours," Joseph Quincy explained, smiling in faint, fine contempt. "He always says that the dark is more interesting than daylight. He likes to prowl around the house until the small hours; I think in the hope of catching it up to some of its tricks. He is less materialistic than he pretends to be when he is with you."

"Evidently he is not much afraid of phenomena," Carew smiled.

“Is a drunkard afraid of whiskey?” Joseph shrugged with a grimacing smile. “Quincy aspires to fill our revered ancestors’ shoes. He would like nothing better than to see phenomena and find out how to make them. It runs in the blood.”

“Have there been many such aspirants?”

Joseph laughed. “You’re wondering if Aunt Sarai was one? Well, I won’t tell her secrets; I never knew them all. But from time to time gossip has fixed on some particular man or woman, of course. Either is eligible for a candidate. During the Revolution a master of the house was swum for a witch by some incensed Tory neighbors who couldn’t understand just what had shielded some ammunition smugglers who’d made a remarkable getaway in broad daylight. He was a patriot, of course; Quincys always pick the winning side.”

“I’m sorry.” Gaylord Carew’s laugh was a little deprecatory. “The founder of your family seems to have picked the losing side: that of the dark.”

“He died in his bed, a wealthy man with friends enough to defend him against the less fooled who feared him.” Joseph shrugged. “He had a right to count himself the winner. Not forever, you would say. It’s true: the sun rises again every nightfall; but the night comes back, too. Day and night, God and Devil—it’s an eternal alternating of power. And I notice that God did not destroy Satan nor Ahura-Mazda Ahriman—whichever symbols you prefer. Darkness is quite as indestructible as light. Even our Puritan ancestors admitted that Satan, the Adversary, was as eternal as God, though they didn’t think quite what they were saying, proclaiming His power and state to be as

everlasting as the Other's, even though they called it a state of everlasting punishment."

Carew laughed. "Yes, it was a naive blasphemy—making God and Satan eternal Partners, sharing humanity between them. But it's the kind of snare into which minds that like punishment will fall. They cut their God in two—made one half of Him an angelic Creator and the other half a punishing Fiend casting His children into perdition. Their very anxiety to separate white and black unalterably and distinctly made them weld the two together in their conception of the Eternal."

"And you still duplicate their mistake in dividing things into white and black." Joseph was grinning delicately, amused and indulgent and very confident; he seemed to have erected a little inner height from which he looked down upon the other. "If you'd face facts squarely, you'd see there are no such things, Carew."

Carew gave him a quirkish gleam of a smile. "What should I call them, then?"

"You would have to re-value them. There is such a thing as art—doing a thing exquisitely and correctly and in good taste. There's waste of force and there are degrees of efficiency in using it. But right and wrong are only phrases, frills of fancy. You've studied sentimental sages' ideas of God, Carew, but God is not a sentimentalist. You've only to look at the world He made to see that. Evolution, the survival of the fittest. Life lives only by the destruction of life; the stronger feeds on the flesh of the weaker. Turn whichever way you will, that is the Law. No human ruler ever lived so magnificently calculating, so ruthless as nature. The spider traps the fly and eats it slowly in ways that are best not thought of; the hen eats the spider, and

the fox eats her, or we serve her on our tables, however humanitarian we may be, if she ceases to earn her keep by laying.

“I’ve noticed you don’t eat meat, but if everything were like you: if no hawk ever pecked a chicken’s eyes out or no housewife ever wrung its neck, the increase of chickens would fill the world. That’s scientific fact. No sane man likes cruelty; that’s for fools like Quincy, who want to be conceited and in their heart are ashamed; but it’s necessary, it is the Law. Do you think a Being all loving-kindness and mercy ordained it, or One in Whose image only strength is made? Are you sure that you would know God if you met Him face to face, Carew?”

“I’m not sure that I can ever conceive of the possibility of such a meeting. But I do know one thing: that the light deepest in me rejects cruelty; I cannot conceive of myself as endowed with a higher vision, greater scruples, than the Eternal.”

“So it comes to that—you leave all ancient wisdom, and fall back on George Fox’s old doctrine of the Inner Light?” Joseph’s smile was delicately derisive.

“Don’t deny George Fox his moment of vision.” Carew’s smile was undisturbed, still quirked a little. “Religions are all truth seen in a glass, darkly; and some rays may shine the same in all glasses. I had a good many things to learn and un-learn in the East; but it taught me to sift, rather than to deny.”

“But not to think out the question of dualism, not to realize that there couldn’t be a God and a Devil, or good and evil, but only a Being whom right and wrong could not measure.” There was a cold mocking satisfaction in

Joseph's eyes; he looked tolerant of another's limitations, amused and faintly bored.

Carew laughed quietly. "For me there is no dualism. We're all metal in the forge now, but when you think in terms of eternity, you realize that the dross that we must all burn out of ourselves is only a temporary and very petty phase. One would hardly dignify it with the name of a partnership with God."

"Are you so sure you know what will be in the finished product—what is dross and what is metal?"

"No. What man could be? Full and perfected being is something we cannot imagine now. But when all attain that, and all will, there will be no weak left to prey on. If that is strength's business, what place then, in that truly artistic universe, for strength—your definition of it?"

Joseph shrugged again. "As you will, Doctor; as you will."

Carew thought, as he left him, that here he saw another working of the chemical element that was Witch House. Pour the corruption into one mold and you evolved Quincy: cheapness made venomous. Pour it into another, subtler and finer, and the result gleamed forth in dark effulgence—this splendid and sweeping rejection of all moralities and immoralities as fantasies.

The other person who had changed was Betty-Ann.

That noon when she had awakened with the bruises magically vanished from her arm had cleft the very foundations of her fear-built universe, rocked out from under her the hideous beliefs that had blackened all her world. To the purely childish part of her it might have seemed like white magic triumphing over black; but she was a modern child who had read her book of knowledge; her bewildered mind went seeking explanations in other

realms of marvel than the discredited supernatural now. But it stumbled; she tried to tell Carew how one evening when they were walking on the seashore.

“If my imagination could make my arm black-and-blue that way, it could do anything—even make up Aunt Sarai.” Her lip quivered a little over the name. “But it does seem awfully queer. I can see about the house; I s’pose it’s just something that isn’t alive—something like electricity—that makes things jump around and fall. One of the things scientists haven’t found out about yet; I know scientific things can be as queer as spooks. But I don’t see what first made me think Aunt Sarai was looking at me out of her picture—before things had started jumping and scaring me; I wasn’t nervous then.

“When I get to thinking about that, and remembering how she looked at me, I get all scared again. I just can’t see how there could not have been anything *real* in it.”

“Then don’t think about it. Susceptible people shouldn’t expose themselves to germs.” Carew’s laugh was warmly reassuring. “Nothing could have convinced you that there was nothing in the hare-dream—once.”

“I know. I s’pose you think I’m awfully silly. I guess I am here; but I didn’t use to be. Before we came here I hadn’t been afraid of the dark for years. Not very much, anyway,” with a qualifying truthfulness. “I only don’t see why I got quite so silly, before anything scary happened.”

His swift warm smile was enfolding. “I don’t think you’re silly. Doctoring sick imaginations is my business.”

“Yes, but what makes them sick? I couldn’t fall down and hurt my imagination, or catch whooping-cough in it.” She laughed a little, merrily, at her own fancy, then sobered. “Oh, I know I’ve imagined a lot of crazy things. I do know

Aunt Sarai isn’t really alive up there in her picture; I just dreamed that some way when I was awake the same way I dreamed about the hare when I was asleep—but there’s something about Witch House that just isn’t good, Gay! It doesn’t like me; I feel that all the time even when I know the rest is just bad dreams!”

She had him in a close place. The child-part of her that was ready to settle down in today’s sunshine, forgetful of yesterday’s unpleasantness, warred both with her reason and with childhood’s equal clairvoyance that gave her new and constant warning of danger. And he could not tell her he did not believe that one detail of the dream that had marked her arm had been shaped by her own imagination; that from beginning to end the whole terrorizing illusion had been a calculated plan.

He would not tell her an ineffectual lie; Witch House would have been quick to unmask that. He shrugged his shoulders.

“Perhaps that’s another of the things that scientists are going to find out about, Betty-Ann—that in some houses there is something that does not seem good.” He laughed a little. “I’m afraid that several of your ancestors weren’t very kind, and that a good many people have been frightened here. And it may be that their unhappiness is stored in the house just as a man’s figure is in a photograph, although the man himself is not there—even such things as chairs and tables may be more sensitive, more like phonograph records than we know—and that it makes some people uncomfortable. If they let it. But we’re not mirrors, Betty; we shouldn’t reflect only what’s around us. We should be ourselves, and leave our own images on the photograph.”

Her eyes widened. That she did not fully understand him made no difference; it was perhaps an advantage. His explanations always dissolved fear by putting something more wonderful in its place, re-directing the imagination that another's flat explanations would have failed to swerve.

"I see. It's like a fairy tale, Gay." She had been walking, with her hand in his; she turned suddenly and caught it in both of hers, looking up into his face. "I s'pose there's nothing bad or alive—really! But I wish we didn't have to live here for nine more years. I wish you didn't have to go! I'm all right now until I get to thinking about that; then I get afraid I'll get scared again!"

He looked down into the turquoise eyes. The high grey wall of the marshalled cliffs hid the house from them. The island lay there bathed in pale sunlight, gnawed at by a grey, sullen ocean that undulated gently, like some great soft serpent waiting its time to strike. The silken-soft monster of the waters, coiling, slithering, in pretended playfulness, about the prey it would eventually devour. There was another serpent coiled around her brain, gnawing at it as softly and slowly and inexorably as the ocean was gnawing away that island that was the last sentinel at land's end.

And he thought, quite suddenly and clearly, of something; something that he had not thought of before, though now, in this clear flash of vision, he saw that ever since the first day he came to Witch House it had been there, a sun slowly rising, old and patterned and inescapable and yet revelation.

Light, and a glory that was solution!

In the middle of that night he woke suddenly, tense and with nerves braced as though to meet some emergency.

He listened. Had some sound startled him out of sleep? But there was no sound anywhere, only the vast black hush of night. The house was quiet, playing to itself the queer little murmurous tunes, meaningless to human ears, that all old houses play at night. He had not even the feeling he had long grown used to, the sense of being watched. Nothing, not even thought, moved towards him under the thick coverlet of the dark.

Yet he could not go back to sleep. It was as if the air itself were a voice whispering: *"On guard!"*

And he knew that this was not a *sent* voice. Neither was it one of the moods that always haunted Witch House, like quicksands in the air, to net the souls of the sensitive and unwary. Nor was it like a bell of warning, a cognizance of some activity in the dark murk where those moods were stored. The voice was his own voice, the observation of senses beyond those of the body, and he who was not yet fully their master, could only follow their guidance blindly.

He knew that he dared not do otherwise than follow.

He rose and dressed, and stepped out into the dark corridor. In Witch House there was no fondness for lights; the narrow space between the walls was like a winding river of pitch. He smiled grimly; if that impulse had come from an alien source he would be walking into a trap; Witch House, having failed when striking at mind, might strike at body.

But the small sure torch that guided him had not been lit at those murky flames; he went on, and the blackness and the stillness stayed black and still around him, passive, not active evil, somnolent malice without brain or eyes.

He let himself out of the house by a side-door. The night was calm and windless. The moon was half-buried in a curdled pool of dark clouds. The seacliffs loomed grey and spectral, not more stationary than the embraced shadows in the tangled garden. Pacing up and down outside the house, he wondered who was sleeping within and who was waking. Something was moving in the silence and the dark, but not physically, very softly, withdrawing its forces from one point to concentrate them on another. Something that he could stop by staying awake? He did not see how or why; he knew only, by those subtle senses, that Witch House had counted on his sleep.

Rounding the east wing he started and stopped suddenly. A white figure stood between the windows of the room that lodged Elizabeth and Betty-Ann. A ghostly figure there in the gloom. He moved towards it quickly, softly, keeping well within the black shadow of the house, far more carefully keeping his mind a blank that no stream of emotion shooting out from it might give warning of his presence.

Within ten paces of the figure a twig snapped under his foot. The shape whirled sharply; he heard a gasping breath that was a fiercely strangled scream. He spoke low and naturally.

“Don’t be frightened, Mrs. Stone. It is I.”

“You!” She relaxed. He could see her smiling faintly through the dark; she was not ghost but human now. A slim figure, birch-straight and birch-vital in her white flannel coat; her slim ivory insteps bare above mules of ivory leather. The lovely womanly youth of her seemed like something that could be heard as well as seen, a note of strange music playing in the dark.

“I didn’t suppose,” with the touch of mischievous mockery that always fleetingly recalled Joseph, “that you ever suffered from insomnia, Dr. Carew.”

He laughed. “I don’t. Tonight somehow, I preferred to stay awake. I’m sorry I crept up on you; I took you for one of the phenomena.”

“Perhaps I am.” She spoke lightly, but her smile was suddenly twisted and bitter. “It’s a restless night, somehow. I couldn’t sleep either; so I came out here. I don’t stand insomnia well. I should have gone walking like you, if I could have left her really alone.”

“Are you worrying about Betty-Ann? She seemed well enough this evening. There was no trouble about sleeping or you would not be out here.”

“No. There never is any trouble about sleeping—now.” But she spoke sombrely, and when she looked up at him again her smile made him think of a candle in the wind: a brave, nervous, barely steadied thing: flickering in the gusts but always rising, burning on. “I know she’s better now, but how long will she keep on being better after you are gone? What use is it, after all? I’ve heard that over and over in the dark tonight: *What use is it?* Is there anything that you or anyone can really do since she has to stay here? I’m sorry; you’ll think I’m talking nonsense. I’d better go in now.” Across the space of darkness she held out her hand to him.

He kept it, and his eyes searched hers in the darkness. “How long have you been lying awake thinking that?”

She said with a tired bitter little laugh, “For an hour or two perhaps; I don’t know. Something seemed to wake me up suddenly and I knew I couldn’t go back to sleep. Then it all poured over me like a wave. Like all hysterical women’s

feelings, I suppose. Not very heroic. I thought I was a cut above that sort of thing. But at least I needn't inflict it on you. Goodnight."

He asked, his mouth quirking a little, quizzically, "Go in—and go on thinking it?"

She answered with that sword-level honesty of hers, "If I can't help it."

"Are you sure that's altogether wise? Too much suppression is unhealthy. We can re-direct our energies, but bottling them up only results in some kind of explosion eventually—or else of corrosion."

"And wasting force that I may need for Betty-Ann's sake is worse than babbling a little?" He could see her weighing that: distastefully but seriously; the bars of pride in the scales with the one thing that, he imagined, had ever been stronger in her—the love for the child.

She laughed again, with a hard self-mockery. "Very well. I'm sorry to be so unoriginal. It does not flatter my vanity to be just another of the hysterical women to whom you have to play father-confessor, but perhaps it is better for you, too. Where shall I begin? Thoughts are like shadows; little in the day-time, but always there; and at night they come out and cover all the world; if you look at them, then you're lost. I don't usually; I don't know what got into me tonight."

He knew. This was why the bell of warning had rung within him, the way that Witch House manipulated thought. Little drops of water wear away a stone; so thoughts, dropped softly, incessantly, into a brain, keep up a delicate but constant strain. And in the dark watches of the night a fresh stream of current pouring into her, charging her with its own numbing, devitalizing poison, might shake the will from its last moorings, sweep the soul out onto strange

seas in whose blackness nothing in all the world seemed to futile, so impossible, as hope.

The tide that he himself had breasted; the dark invasion that was least discoverable, most inescapable.

But she was not Betty-Ann to be altogether shielded from the truth. He said simply, “I know. Hopelessness—the uselessness of trying to fight Witch House. I was troubled with those thoughts one night, until I realized that *they were not my own.* Too many people have thought them here for nearly three hundred years. From that first little Elizabeth Harper on. And they are so well camouflaged by following the exact processes of our own nerves. Don’t blame yourself; only be on your guard next time. This is not a place for clear thinking unless you can learn to rise above it.”

“Betty-Ann can’t rise above it. I’ve brought her into the world, and for her the world is *this.* I’ve been thinking tonight what I’ve done to her; she was the coin I bought my own salvation with. My own salvation—I’ve sacrificed one person after another for that. First Hugh, now her.”

He said quietly, “In what way are you sacrificing Betty-Ann? You would have left Witch House, if it hadn’t seemed that this nightmare of your aunt would go with you?”

She replied as quietly, “I don’t mean now. I mean she shouldn’t have been born; she was part of the price I paid selfishly, to save myself—I, who should not have been born either. There’s a taint in all of us Quincys of Witch House: strange susceptibilities and strange thirsts, or both! I know it’s madness, and I think it’s something worse. I’ve felt it all around me in the dark tonight like doom: the thing we can’t escape, the thing that’s in us and can’t be cut out.

“You don’t understand, Dr. Carew; you’re outside, clean and wholesome and safe from yourself; I begin to wonder if you are safe here, if I should have asked you to come. Witch House destroys what it can’t absorb. Look at that first Elizabeth, who must have stood fast in her own way. Now you’ll know I’m mad.” She was smiling crookedly. “And it’s true just now; but the other is always true: we should, none of us, ever have been. Old Joseph de Quincy should have burned; I’ve wished tonight that he had; I’ve lain in the dark, seeing and smelling the fire.”

“No.” Gaylord Carew’s rich voice had the finality of iron. “We are born into the vehicles we have earned, Elizabeth. Tainted blood isn’t an undeserved infliction from some vicious ancestor; it’s something we have soiled for ourselves and must cleanse ourselves. You would not have escaped it, if Joseph de Quincy had burned childless; you would not escape it if this house, and you in it, burned tonight. The work would only be to begin again, another time.”

She said with another flicker of mockery, “Karma?” then rested silent, digesting that. “Well, I don’t like part of it; we none of us like accepting responsibility for our own shortcomings, even if it was incurred ages ago. But I can see it. And that it makes violence useless. I can’t cut myself or Betty-Ann free from the wheel; we must work free. But that’s hard on her; she’s so little. I have never understood God; He has always seemed to me a sort of super-force torturing us without more sense of guilt than ordinary people feel for torturing the people who are bounden to them.”

Carew thought of Joseph’s God of Strength; here was a like conception, viewed from the woman’s angle; and a stir

of admiration moved him for the quality of the courage that could fight on alone against such a universe, at the mercy of the whims of a vast and heartless and playful Being, through Whose own designs she might be breaking: for the conscience, or rather, purity of feeling, that could care about the method. No fear cheapened her regrets; she believed herself answerable to nothing; all the virtue she had, like her courage, was solely hers. Her God, too, was a devil, but she would not worship Him.

Before he could answer she spoke again, abruptly, “People say that your mother went to the East to try to learn how to communicate with your father, who was dead? I’ve wondered; do you think she ever did it?”

He knew of whom she was thinking: of the big blond boy with Betty-Ann’s blue eyes who had paced the shore so many times at evening, watching the island for a glimpse of her.

“I do not know whether she did or not. I know she never expected to. She made certain that he and she were both safe in eternity: both living, not dead. I think that in those last few years she *realized* eternity too clearly to mind waiting much.”

Elizabeth Stone drew a deep breath. “To be so sure that he had lost nothing, that he could lose nothing—that would be rather wonderful. Hugh would be alive today if he had not married me.”

“Wasn’t that his business?” Carew’s voice had a grave, unsentimental sympathy. “It seems to me that he had a right to choose; he did not have to marry you. I cannot imagine that you lied to him.”

“I didn’t; but I didn’t give him his money’s worth—his life’s worth, rather—either. I did give him money’s worth,

just exactly that; and because I hated so to give it I thought it was a great deal, but it wasn't worth much, really. It never actually made him happy. I traded myself to him for escape from Witch House; I made my bargain and I kept it. But I couldn't have, except for Betty-Ann; sometimes during those first months I could have killed him just for his niceness and his stupidity and his loving me. I felt like something in a trap; it was done, and I had done it, on my own proposal, not his, and he had lost all his prospects for me; the only fair thing was to stick it out. But I wanted to go back to Witch House; I ached to, as drug-users ache for drugs, and God knows I hadn't realized quite how much I would not want Hugh!

"But all that stopped when Betty-Ann was born; I have never wanted Witch House since; only the loathing was left; insofar, I've cleaned myself, at least." She smiled twistedly. "I even loved Hugh a little, as if he had been another child, a much less loved one. We agreed very well together; we had a harmonious home; Betty-Ann has nothing but happy memories of it. I wanted her to have her chance, every chance. But deep down, Hugh always knew it was she whom I loved, not he. There used to be something fawning in the way he played with her; she was not his child to him, she was my child, of whom he happened to be the father, she was his hold on me. Oh, I did my best! We pretended; he would kiss me and say, 'Love me, Elizabeth?' and I would kiss him and lie, and we would both know I lied.

"And then the depression came, and he lost his job, as he never could have lost his job with his uncle here. We had to sell our home and our furniture, and Hugh got more and more miserable because he felt that in my eyes he must seem a failure in everything. Aunt Sarai sent us my father's

and mother's things finally. They had had some valuables, which she had always refused to give up to me, but now she said that I'd need to pawn them to keep such a luxury as a beggar-husband on. Unfortunately, Hugh saw the letter before I could get a chance to destroy it."

"I see," Carew said grimly. "It was after that?"

"Not right away. There was a scene. He said he knew that I should have married one of my cousins, that in my heart I wished I had, whatever I might say, that he had failed to make me happy, failed even to make a living! But I managed to get him quieted down. But it was the one time I didn't lie to him; I have never wished, except for his sake, that I had married either of my cousins, and I think he thought it was just another time.

"There was a bronze-handled Tibetan dagger in the package, something I'd never seen before, or known my parents had. It seemed to fascinate Hugh; he wondered what it had been used for, thought it might have been a knife of sacrifice. I suppose I should have suspected; I was just amused; it made me think of a little boy with tin soldiers. Hugh had always loved life, mere living, so much more than I did. And then, two afternoons later, when I came home after taking Betty-Ann to a movie, I found him slumped over the table. I thought he was asleep, and I put my hand on his shoulder, and then I saw the bronze handle was sticking through his shirt."

She was silent, shuddering a second. Carew felt something colder than the night touch him: something from spaces colder than the poles and blacker than any night.

Elizabeth went on, "It was my father's knife, you see. He said in his note that it had given him the idea; that he never would have had the courage except for the sight, the feel of

it. He was not sure, when he wrote, that he would have it anyway; though he felt that Betty-Ann and I would be so much safer if he were dead, and I could go home. He said he felt Death in the knife, drawing him." She said slowly, her voice sinking, "He had the courage."

"Have you that knife now?" Carew's tones were quick, electric. "You brought it back to Witch House?"

She looked at him with surprise. "Yes. Why?"

"I think that you should put it in a safety-deposit vault; let me keep it in the meantime." Carew spoke less crisply; he smiled a little. "I can't explain now; it might and probably does, mean nothing now. But I should like to have it."

She stared at him wonderingly, then laughed. "I'm not quite *that* mad, Dr. Carew; I shan't use it. But if it will make you feel safer." Her laughter stopped abruptly.

Carew was not looking at her. He was looking at the house, though he knew that he should see nothing there. It had changed suddenly, like a closed eye opening. It watched them there together in the night, all its walls and windows like the cells of a vast eye, material organisms obeying an unseen consciousness, as, after all, all eyes are; and it watched them with an all-pervasive resentment that made knives seem like children's toys.

Elizabeth said, laughing again a little uncertainly, "It's odd. I don't feel as if we were alone any longer. Will you excuse me, Dr. Carew? We can finish our talk another time; I had better go back to Betty now."

He nodded. He, too, had no desire to talk under that fiery gaze; he was not afraid, but he was fastidious. The house, the body of the Unseen Watcher, had surprised them; it knew that its attack had been balked, and that he was

awake, and he wondered a little at the depths of anger in the air about him; anger that seemed almost to hiss like actual flame.

That sense of unseen vigilance companioned him back to his room and into it. He did not want it to see his thoughts; so he willed himself, as he could, to sleep. When he woke, as he had also willed, in the grey dawn, he was alone; the invisible watcher had retreated. He lay and stretched himself.

He was in some way, happy. The dawn was sweet, grey beginning to glow with rose through the windows. Somewhere out over the waters he heard the cry of a seabird. His mind and body were tuned in harmony to the glow. He felt all life as an ordered harmony, himself a quickened note in it.

This was abundance, fullness, riches. It was light, and the flashing of mighty colors; it was flame, and it was song. The vision on the seashore, the pictures of all these last three weeks. *Elizabeth. Elizabeth!*

Song that could swell and fill the whole of life if she loved him as she loved her, if they two could achieve that golden intensity of being, of welding flame.

But not too soon. She had sold herself once for her own escape from Witch House; she might sell herself for her child’s. And he thought with deep pity and a certain distaste of the man who had been the buyer. To have loved her and had her, and yet never to have had her! Fullness that was starvation, abstinence that was torture and satisfaction that could yet be only husks, a debased rapture that the woman you loved endured instead of sharing. The childishness of it and the animality! To take a body and pretend that it was all, that you did not miss the answering

love-fire in the lips against yours, in the arms about your neck! To be tolerated, instead of loved, by the woman you wanted with all your body and soul.

True enough that Elizabeth had not been altogether fair; she had offered, and in youth's ears the elemental command would have been almighty, irresistible: "Take her, love her, see if there will not be an answer!" And then the long, slow, shaming waiting for the answer that never came, the keeping up, in weakness, of the pretense that degraded love to license. Rescuing knights must not be tradesmen.

But she would never tolerate Gaylord Carew. He wanted too much more than Hugh Stone had ever received to take as little. There was too much of the trained ascetic in him to confuse flesh and spirit; if he could not feast at the full table it would be easier for him to do without crumbs. He could give her his name and take nothing, but no wooer is so awkwardly placed as a husband. Not unless there was no other way to save Betty-Ann would he so bind his hands.

So, until the appointed hour flashed into being, there could be no word but *Wait!*

Breakfast found Betty-Ann happy and friendly, bubbling over with morning spirits. There were special causes of excitement; Elizabeth told Carew of one. "There's a Saturday matinee at the movie theatre here. Julia has to go over to the village to do the marketing" (Julia, the cook's niece, was the girl who had replaced the frightened Mabel), "and I've asked her to take Betty along and go to the pictures afterward."

Carew understood. She was making an opportunity to be alone with him, to finish last night's conversation. And un-

loverly though the occasion was, his pulses leaped a little in anticipation.

Betty-Ann was running on excitedly, “It’s all about the Civil War, Gay, and spies, and lovely ladies with big, full, ruffly skirts on I There was a picture in the paper yesterday. And the hero thinks he’s got to shoot the heroine.”

Carew thought how marked the change in her was. When he had first come to Witch House she would have gone into hysterics at the idea of being sent out alone with a servant; just as she would have been too nervous to sit still long enough to see any picture through. Now there was no sign of hostility toward Julia, of anything but ecstatic pleasure in the promised treat.

Her next remark was startling. “And you couldn’t ever guess what I saw this morning, Gay! Mother won’t believe it, she thinks I’m still imagining things. But it was a cat—a real, live, little kitten!”

Elizabeth said unenthusiastically, “She is certain she saw it. And there are still no cats on the island; I’ve asked the servants. It was early in the morning, and she ran out into the passage before she was hardly awake; I think it was what psychologists would call a ‘wish fulfillment.’ ”

“But I wasn’t thinking about cats!” Betty-Ann protested. “It *was* there, Mother; I could see it perfectly plain, even if the passage wasn’t quite light yet. And it was real; it wasn’t a witch’s cat. Witch’s cats would be black, and this was white. It was nice!”

Elizabeth shook her head. “But you said it wasn’t there when you tried to catch it, Sweetheart. It had disappeared.”

Gaylord Carew said quietly, “Perhaps you were half asleep, Betty?” He did not think so. He was to wonder,

later, at how little he had thought. But that morning as never before he was conscious of sex and its incompleteness; the glamor lay upon his mind like a warm bright cloud, shot with strange scents and music, confusing, dulling a little, its keenness.

And Betty-Ann was still at the age of imagination: her own, overstrained and played upon by Dark Powers, perhaps still off-balance. The illusion, not having been frightening, could only have been subjective.

Yet some stray tendril of caution made him add, “But if by any chance a kitten should have been accidentally brought over from the mainland, it may be feeling pretty scared and strange. Better not chase it, Betty; that will only make it run from you more.”

She said, “All right, Gay,” a little reluctantly, but obviously somewhat consoled by his having thought that there might possibly be a kitten.

The rest of the day was uneventful.

Four o’clock found him alone with Elizabeth. They met in the smaller inner room used for breakfast and lunch, not in the great living-room. There was a fire on the hearth, for the wind was cold. The small firelit room made a circle about them, an island in the sea of old dark rooms.

Elizabeth unlocked a drawer, took out a case, and gave it to him.

“Here it is. You’ll be surer than ever,” her shadowy smile twisting, “that I’m an unfit custodian for it after you’ve heard what I have to say.”

She was moving towards the fire, and for a second he looked inside the case, touched what lay within: an old bronzehandled dagger such as lamas carry. And knew that he touched Death. That cold sliver of steel was steeped in

death, in venom worse than any which plant ever grew or human hands brewed. The darkness round the blade was hideous and invisible as poison gas, hideous as the very spring and source of all murder.

He knew what he had expected to know, and what Elizabeth need not know. He turned again to her.

She had not sat down. She stood before the fire, facing him, her straight slimness rigid, oddly braced. The fancy came to him that she might have stood just so, proud and unafraid and straight in the red fire-glow, had she been bound to a stake.

She flashed to the point with her usual directness.

"I told you too much last night, Dr. Carew, not to tell you more. I did not run away with a man I didn't love merely because I was unhappy at home; I'm not so weak as that. Perhaps my real reasons are less pretty. I wasn't indulging in vapors last night when I spoke of tainted blood."

He did not tell her not to speak of matters that were painful to her; both as man and physician he thought it might be better if she did. Here was an old and festering sore that had long needed sun; and yet he knew that it was not because he was a physician that she was stripping it before him. For her own sake she would have preferred to be silent; it was, somehow, for him that she was determined to bare to his eyes that naked ugliness.

He said with not unfriendly dryness, "that is an *idee fixe* of yours and Joseph's, isn't it—that you Quincys are made of different stuff from the rest of us? If it's true it's also false, and certainly unwholesome. Would you mind telling me just how it developed, going back to the beginning?"

She laughed. "I warn you it will sound like a mad-woman's story. Like some of Betty-Ann's, in spots. I have

always had reason to believe her stories."

"I guessed that much."

"You call it guessing? Quincy is afraid to be with you because he thinks you have studied with men who can *see* thoughts. Sometimes that frightens me, too; sometimes it relieves me. I've always felt, away from Witch House, as if I were gagged; as if I could shout from the housetops and no one would understand, any more than if I had cried out in Greek. Once or twice at first I tried to tell Hugh a little, and he thought I was mad. He would probably have been frightened away if he had been less in love with me."

She paused a second, made a sharp gesture as if to shrug off the garment of that memory. "It's hard to find the real beginning. It goes back so far. Into the kind of childhood recollections other people don't have. Into a kind of private Quincy universe. The island was the whole world then. The servants and Aunt Sarai were grown-ups: beyond the pale. Joseph and Quincy and I were society—all the society we knew. Joseph and I paired off; I won't say we were fond of each other; it seems a sentimental, inaccurate definition; but we were leagued together. Quincy resented it—naturally enough, I can see now. Savagely and crudely, too. He played tricks on us; sometimes Joseph and he fought."

Gay smiled. "Normal enough, so far as it went."

"It went farther. Witch House isn't very much of a place for normal play. Ours developed along odd lines."

"There were old stories whose luridness would catch a child's imagination?" His rich voice had the quiet unemotional interest that never alarmed his patients, always drew them out and on. Here was what he had long suspected, glimpsed.

She laughed, a little deprecatorily. “Yes, again. Joseph and I were crammed full of them. We used to talk and talk about the things old Joseph de Quincy was supposed to have done. We were children; we didn’t believe they were all tales and superstition. The flames that had filled the Inquisition’s prison, and yet hadn’t burned it, that hadn’t been a real fire, and yet people had seen it. How had he made it? We were wild with curiosity to find out; it would have been a wonderful power to have, and we were of his blood: why shouldn’t we?

“The old Quincys had left a very fair library about witchcraft-books written in the days when it was still a live issue, like kidnapping or racketeering. Glanvil’s and King James,’ Wier’s and Webster’s.”

“And Cotton Mather’s *Demonologie?* I know. I’ve seen them.”

“You noticed?” She shot him a quick glance. “We pored over them. But Cotton Mather’s crude explanations about devils didn’t satisfy us. I think our curiosity was as much scientific as superstitious. Besides, we wanted books that would teach us how to do things—really work magic. Joseph sent for all the books, ancient and modern, that he could learn about: books on devil-worship and Eastern magic, and Tibetan monasteries—anything that might help us.

“When we had spurts of doing especially well at our Latin, poor old Timmons, the tutor who came over from the mainland, didn’t know we were trying to translate certain formulae, learn how to do charms. We tried a lot of crazy experiments. Sometimes Quincy stole our books; he was as avid for the stuff as we. But we laughed at him for praying

to the devil. We didn't believe in prayer, only in undiscovered natural laws. We were mad to have powers!"

Carew could imagine all the things she might have wanted: the innumerable vengeances of any ill-treated child, the fairyland delights of a normal one, and the sheer, strange thirst that many persons of any age feel for two things: the Unknown, and power.

And she had not known what it was that she played with: here in this house, of all places.

"When we read in Rydberg's *Norroena* of the *vafirflame,* we thought that that must have been what Joseph de Quincy had made. After all, if those had not been phantom flames round Brunnhilde's rock, could even the hero Siegfried have passed them unscathed? The fires in Nicholas Roerich's camp in the *Altai-Himalaya,* too—quite visible fires that everybody in the great Russian's camp could bear witness to. They had burned, without burning, in both modern Tibet and ancient Norway. And for our ancestor in a French prison. We thought that they must be one of the First Secrets, part of a worldwide primeval science of magic. But we couldn't make them. We never had any real success, though I don't know what Joseph had later, alone—except with Li Wan."

"Your cousins' Chinese ancestress?"

"Yes. It was partly the way children have of inventing imaginary playmates, partly an effort to practice what we'd read about Tibetan materializations. I have seen her clearly, at one side of me—or, oftenest, a little *behind* me—many times."

She looked straight at him, challengingly, as she spoke. But he betrayed no surprise.

“Not a ghost but a creature the two of you made in her image? You would have had legitimate help from your imaginations there.”

“Legitimate or illegitimate, we had it. When I look back on those days I always seem to see her dimly, as I see myself and Joseph dimly, with her sleek black hair and her red-and-gold trousers, and her faint little smile—just as she is in the picture behind us, watching us.”

“You liked her?”

“Yes. Her portrait had always fascinated me since I was a very little girl. She looked so pretty there on the wall, and so bright in this dark house, and I felt sorry for her because she had been treated so badly, her little boy taken away from her.”

Gaylord Carew said with a slight frown on his face, “One would. She’s a natural magnet there in the gallery: the sense of color, the appeal to pity. Not too safe a one, though, in a house like this, especially beneath the very roof where she had killed herself; the vital forces such a woman might leave behind her could be very real and unpleasant things if you were able to tap their plane.”

“You mean because she died in a passion of hate and fury against this family in particular? I understand. But I wasn’t afraid. I was visualizing her in company with Joseph, who was of her blood.”

“Using your forces voluntarily to help bring her to life, as Betty-Ann has used hers involuntarily on Aunt Sarai? And the results were only what you have described?”

“For a long time, yes. Joseph hoped that we could call up what Webster would have called her ‘astral or sydereal spirit,’ that middle substance betwixt the soul and the body, even if the really immortal part of her had gone on. He said

that modern orthodoxy was the only great religion foolish enough to restrict man to two parts: soul and body. That all ancient folklore, all old Eastern faiths, knew that the self was multiple, not simple, like that.

"He suggested once that we kill a chicken and give that middle substance the blood so that she could materialize herself more completely out of that vital essence of earth-life. He talked of the legend of how the old Roman gods appeared to the Emperor Julian, pale and emaciated, begging for the sacrificial blood they had fed on before Christianity. He said savages still kept the beings behind their idols alive and strong with sacrifices."

"So? He had read to some purpose."

Gaylord Carew's face was suddenly grim, and the woman smiled a little.

"So, now you begin to see. We must sound like a pair of little degenerates. But I liked chickens. I was horrified at the idea of killing one. We had a furious quarrel, the only one I can ever remember our having, and Joseph said he could understand why old Joseph de Quincy had killed his wife. She must have bored him with just such squeamishness. But I had old Joseph in me too; he would only kill the other—her part in me—take it out of me. And I told him I wouldn't be anybody but myself, no matter how many people there were in me they were all me now and I would keep them there; he couldn't stop me."

Gaylord Carew considered. Symbols. Those two quarrelling youngsters had represented forces far older and vaster than anything they knew or dreamed. That which had been Elizabeth Harper still drawing back from the gulf to which the dark virus in Joseph de Quincy's blood had led her, as good always draws back from evil: the girl

defending her integrity as an individual, her right to full and free being, against the boy.

"And so the sacrifice was not performed?"

She admitted reluctantly, "I'm afraid it was. Joseph said he would do it alone, and I saw blood and feathers afterward. I think he did such things for Li Wan and other purposes several times, alone."

"And after you and he had made up, you went on playing with Li Wan?"

"Of course. I was as eager for her to be completely real as Joseph was. And she did seem to be more real, after those rites of his. Once or twice I even thought she touched me—the lightest, faintest touch—as I passed her. Joseph said she did, and for me to reach out and touch her; I'd find out she was real. But I wouldn't. My nerve failed, perhaps," her delicate mouth twisted a little, wryly, "at crucial points. But I wasn't afraid of her otherwise. I simply had a queer feeling that it would be, somehow, against the Law."

He smiled at her a little oddly. "You never intended to kill old Joseph, any more than you intended to let your cousin kill that first Elizabeth. How long were you able to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds?"

"Until we were all sent away to school. For four years after that, we were home only for holidays. Then I was eighteen; the boys were allowed to go to college, but I wasn't. I was alone. No girl friends—all the ties I had made, the life I had lived at school, ended. Aunt Sarai wouldn't allow me to make visits or receive any. I fell back once more on Joseph, as she had planned. We experimented with magic in the attic again, as we had when we were little."

"That was the last summer before you left home?" His tones had the warm, soothing mellowness of a golden bell.

“I’ve wondered what happened, how the end came.”

She left the fire and sat down; she leaned forward, hands folded on her knees, brooding.

“It was a long summer. It has something of the quality of a dream to look back on, a kind of dimness. Incredible. You may have heard, Dr. Carew,” she spoke with a simple and unembarrassed dignity, “that my cousins both loved me. That is true, in its way. They made love to me that summer. Quincy annoyed me. I should not have cared to meet him far from the house. But with Joseph it was different.” She hesitated, not defining that difference. Women had always so hesitated, Gaylord Carew thought with a sudden stab, since the beginnings of sex and convention and time.

She went on at last with simple frankness. “I didn’t want Joseph to make love to me and yet I did. A kind of fiery trembling in my body, and yet cold, such cold, in my heart. He said we could do wonderful things together; that we could *live* as vividly as flames burn where now we were only breathing. See things, find out things. Magic was talked of as well as love. And I used to feel that Li Wan watched and listened while we talked; she came back, there in the old attic-room.

“I was wildly eager and yet wildly afraid. As if Joseph could open doors for me, doors on strange, wonderful places I couldn’t even dream of. But as if, once I opened them, I could never get back again, be myself, my own self and all my self, as I had before. I would be turned into something else, something that was part of that other world with him. And I couldn’t bear the idea of it much, madly as I wanted to look through those doors.”

She paused and waited, but he made no comment. He, too, waited, and something sexless and impersonal in his

attitude gave her strength to go on. She put out a hand, and the white fingers played nervously over the dark chair-arm.

"I am stripping myself before you, telling things women don't ordinarily tell men. I did not sleep well that summer. I used to lie awake in the dark, wondering if I would hear Joseph's step coming towards my locked door. Stiff with fear that it would come, stiff with fear that if I went to sleep I would get up and *unlock the door!* And dreadfully, secretly, enjoying the waiting, the fear. *Wanting* to hear it! I had only a part of myself to fight him with. It wasn't morality that worried me—any relationship between Joseph and me would have been serious and permanent enough. Too permanent.

"August was very hot that year. The days were blazing bright and the air, even here by the sea, felt heavy as stones. It was so hot that I could hardly lift my hand; I was worried and worn out. I wondered if I were not being a fanciful fool, if it would not be better for me to marry Joseph, who was perhaps offering me all I really wanted, and as much as any girl could expect, if something more. I knew that until I married I should be a prisoner in Witch House. Aunt Sarai would never let me go out, meet other men, for fear I should not marry one of the boys and set up the Quincy family again. But if I married Joseph, she would set us free; we could travel, go where we pleased."

"Set you and him free—not you. I see." Carew's voice was very gentle.

She did not look at him. She went on nervously, "I had lain down on the couch in the living-room, thinking. It was very hot and very still; I dozed. I must have dozed there all afternoon—the kind of sleep that does not rest, does not

make you feel that you have really been away. When I awakened, or thought I awakened, it was twilight; Li Wan was sitting by me, looking at me with her dark eyes. It shows that I was asleep that I didn't think this very strange. It was dim, as things are in dreams, but all day had been dim. I was so heavy with heat and sleep.

"She talked to me—only I cannot remember ever hearing either of our voices—in a gentle, friendly, very Chinese way, about the duty of a woman to her house. Her love for, her pride in, her race and its continuance: her chief glory, that could only be in bearing sons to build its future. And my house was ruined, pulled down. She had done that. It flashed into my brain to ask why she should concern herself about it. But her answering *thought* was that this was the right re-beginning for the Quincy house: Joseph and I together, healing old wrongs, undoing the work of her hate. And I saw the vision she was building up; I was beginning to feel a glow of pride in it. I wondered what it would look like—a baby, a baby boy of Joseph's and mine. A little, live baby, as hers had been in this very house all those years ago! So many years! She was dead. How could she be sitting there, talking with me?

"It shocked me so that I sat upright, awake. The room was dark; it *was* twilight; and the door was opening and Joseph coming in. He smiled at me and said, 'Hello, Elizabeth,' but I couldn't answer him. I was suddenly, terribly afraid. I rose and walked towards the door. As I passed him he smiled and said, 'There's someone there, Elizabeth. You'll have to push past her.'

"And I looked—and Li Wan was there—standing between me and the door. I could see her quite plainly in the twilight, her bright, trousered figure, her dark eyes

watching me, even the jade ornament in her hair. If I opened the door it would strike her; I couldn't go through without brushing her.

"And I tried to run, but it seemed so hard to run towards that. I never had known how many figures there were on the rug; they seemed to be all running backwards, away from where *she* stood. How long it can take to cross a floor, even when you are going fast!

"And as I came nearer she put out her hand, a long, thin old ivory hand, to touch me. I knew it would take hold of my arm when I reached her. And I felt as if I could not, *could not* bear it, as if I would rather, a hundred times rather, be killed or tortured with any pain I had ever known or heard of than be touched by that hand that wasn't flesh!

"Yet, if I did not pass her, I knew I should have to stay in there with her and Joseph. And I knew that I should be so terrified that it would kill me, the inside of me if not the outside. I couldn't bear for her to touch me, and I couldn't bear to stay. It was the peak of agony—a horror one can hardly bear to remember, let alone feel!

"And then, in a kind of grey-white flash, I saw that I could pass her if I *would,* if my will could carry me on. If I could hold fast—fast—

"I got to the door and her hand fell on my arm; took it. It was cold: light and spongy, like touching mist—if you could feel mist. It turned me sick; I think I almost fell. But I opened the door, I ran up the stairs, alone, and when I looked over my shoulder, Joseph was standing in the doorway, watching me, with no expression at all on his face, alone."

She stopped. Her lips were white and there was perspiration at their corners. She wiped it off determinedly

with her handkerchief, her dark eyes still staring fixedly into emptiness. He laid his hand over hers and leaned forward, thrusting his face squarely between her and that emptiness. His hand was warm, humanly warm and strong, and his eyes burned through the vision before hers to the tranced centres of consciousness. Color came back into her face. She smiled up at him, a fleeting, mischievous echo of her wry smile.

"You must think me a very good subject for hypnotism, Doctor, so completely to hypnotize myself. And don't blame Joseph. Whatever his share of responsibility was, he meant me nothing he thought harm; he always, all our lives, stood my friend against Aunt Sarai. His way was simply the way of Witch House."

He shrugged. "Yet I notice it was not your way. As for that figure you saw I think it was probably the creation of your mind and your cousin's—and perhaps of some forces she left behind her, remnants of her own hate. She could not have carried that with her, you know," he said simply, "where she has gone. You had invited it. So that was the end?"

"No." She was herself again, the calm that had never been broken smoothed into wry serenity. "I felt better after that. More sure of myself, of my own strength to do only what I chose to do. I had won a battle, you see—a mad sort of one. I slept at night."

He nodded. "The normal reaction. You had learned that there was something in you greater than your fears. You had become conscious of your own strength, not merely of others'. So something else happened?"

"Yes. The end came ten days later, when Joseph and Quincy fought."

“Fought? There was truth in that village tale then?”

“You might call it a fight. I saw it. They never laid a hand on each other.” She shrugged in her turn, smiling more wryly than ever.

He waited in silence. She went on.

“I had spent the afternoon in a cave, under the cliffs, with Joseph, slipped away from the house to meet him there. He had promised not to make love to me, and he kept his word. It was cool there. We were happy, companionable—like children again. Closer than we had been in a long time, because we weren’t struggling. I wasn’t afraid any more. It felt good to be friends again. He was the only person that I’d ever been able to talk to, all my life, without reservations, the only friend I’d ever had.

“Then at evening we came home. Quincy was waiting for us. I could see that he was in a jealous rage; I expected a scene—but not quite the kind of one that happened. Joseph was standing under one of the portraits, and all of a sudden it fell. I don’t know what made him spring aside in time. He was as quick as light. And the picture crashed to the floor as if it had been thrown there, violently. If it had struck him, it would have killed him.

“I screamed. And he said, smiling, ‘So you would, would you, Brother?’ Then the cord that held a portrait near Quincy lifted itself off the hook—Z *saw* it—and the picture sprang straight at Quincy, knocked him down, though he partly dodged it. I knew then what had frightened me so: *he had tried to kill Joseph with the other!*

“Quincy jumped up with all hell in his face, but he didn’t make a sound. Elis lips were set and his eyes were fixed and glaring a little, as if he were making some kind of effort. And a chair jumped at Joseph from behind—hit him

in the back and brought him to his knees. Quincy was springing at him, but he called calm and unafraid, ‘Get out of here, Elizabeth. The fool might hurt you!’ And then a vase from one of the tables hurtled through the air and struck Quincy. It was not heavy, and it didn’t knock him down, but it jarred him and hurt him, and Joseph had time to get up.

“So it went on. Every hard thing in the room they threw at each other, without ever touching anything. It was like some kind of ghastly pillow-fight, on a monstrous, murderous scale. The clock flew through the air like a cannonball, straight toward Joseph’s head, and some unseen force seemed to stop it. For a second it hung and trembled there in the air—*with nothing under it;* then it turned and flew like lightning at Quincy; he barely dodged it.”

“You did not obey Joseph and go?”

“No farther than the door. I was too anxious; I couldn’t leave Joseph. I was frightened to death and sick with horror, and yet I was excited—pleasurably excited, too. It thrilled me. It was the greatest exhilaration I had ever known. They had learned how to use that poltergeist-power that had tormented us so when we were children, and they were using it to fight for *me.* I felt as proud, as excited, as if I were being crowned a queen. I laughed and clapped my hands. I wanted Joseph to win and come to me.

“And he did win. Quincy never came at him after that first time; he dared not relax his guard enough. It was harder for him to move things than for Joseph; he was soon shaking, and sweat ran down his face after the blood had stopped. He got bewildered and groggy-looking, and I

laughed to see him looking like that, and then a vase struck him squarely and he fell.

"Joseph looked at him to be sure he wasn't dead—that would have been awkward; neither of us thought of it as anything worse than awkward—and then stepped over him, laughing, and came towards me.

"And then something strange happened, like a flash or a bolt of lightning going through me—like light, and yet as cold as ice. I slammed the door in his face; locked him in. And I heard him laugh again and call after me, 'Why waste time running away, Elizabeth? I'll only come and get you, and you won't fight me now.'

"That was the worst of it; I knew, as I ran down towards the beach, that I wouldn't fight him long, that he could do whatever he pleased with me and I would want him to. I was wanting him all the time I was running; I was fire all over except for that cold icy shrinking that was somehow more I than I was. And I remembered how Hugh Stone had looked at me. With that fire in me, I understood what he could feel for me, what I could do with that look. He was the only way out. I hadn't any money to run away, and if I had had, Joseph would have followed me. And Hugh could only take the outside of me; he couldn't get the inside, like Joseph."

She stopped, laughed with a sudden tinkling harshness, and threw out her hands.

Carew, too, was silent. He was seeing the scene she had described in all its stark uncleanness. Two young warlocks fighting for the favor of a witch, fighting as simply and savagely as tomcats under the staining cloak of their sorcery, and nothing to thwart the foredoomed design except that in the young witch there had been something

more than primitive passions and unholy thirsts, something that was Elizabeth.

It was that he saw as the saving light. Herself: the woman, the individual, not the mere blind tool of Nature and Witch House, forever more than the descendant of Joseph de Quincy—herself. True at the last to her unrealized recognition of that self as individual and eternal, accountable to the God within. He rose and faced her, looking into her eyes.

"You had a purpose in telling me all this Elizabeth." For the third time he spoke her name, and for the third time she did not seem to wonder at it. "What was it? We can afford to take off disguises. Do you still love—if that is the word—your cousin?"

She rose and her eyes challenged his.

"No. I think I never loved anyone but Betty-Ann. But I'm not trying to make you love me, either. I will not play that trick a second time—even for Betty-Ann."

The fire glowed. Pale fog was sealing up the windows, but inside the light seemed brighter, seemed to hedge them in a golden ring. The silence was strong and musical, like a tide.

Elizabeth sat down again.

"Do you think that was vain of me? But I had to warn you. For me there's only fear and loathsomeness in Witch House now; all the other's gone—burned out, like a fever you don't have twice. I am safe from myself; but not for other people. When one's entangled in such things as this, there's a price to pay. You know that; I imagine your kind hates sorcery worse than any other."

He said, "I do not hate you."

“No. I know you couldn’t.” There was no coquetry in the words: only a gravity that was somehow an acceptance. “You could never hate me; you understand me too well. We can always understand what we say to each other; sometimes even what we think and do not say.”

On those words she rested. Warmth flowed between them—brightness, and a strange, lulling peace. One of those rare intimacies that know no doubts or embarrassments or evasions, when the soul is delivered up from the vast cold of its individual loneliness.

Something seemed to have relaxed in her, like a coiled spring. The armor of her will had slipped from her, all the weapons of resistance and resolve; she rested there, a beautiful woman in her beauty, still young, still exquisitely, tragically full of life. There was a tide before her and she drifted with it, she who had fought with many tides. Later she might battle back to the hard shore, but for a space the waters sang too sweetly, glowed too brightly beneath an elemental light.

She had warned him, and he would not be warned. And for this space his strength, not that of Witch House, seemed to make destiny, her destiny, that she had worked so long and hard to keep in her own hands.

The firelight cast a rosiness on her face. She spoke softly, and her voice dreamed, “It wasn’t by chance I called you in for Betty-Ann. I had thought of you for a long time. Ever since I was seventeen and spending the summer with the Staffords at the Bass Rocks. Sara Stafford was my friend at school. You were to have visited them that summer, too; they talked of you and of your mother, Mrs. Stafford’s friend. I could say nothing, but I wondered so what you and

she had found: whether there was a bright side to what was always leading Joseph and me into the dark.

“Joseph would have laughed at light, called it sentimentalists’ vagaries, but I was always sure that the God Joseph believed in couldn’t have created me.

“And you might have answered the riddle—all my riddles. I suppose I glorified you into a kind of Lohengrin. When word came that you had changed your mind and were going back to Vienna that summer I went down alone to the beach and cried. Schoolgirl’s fantasticness: but I felt as if something that had been meant to happen had been stopped. As if the swanboat had been turned back before it ever came, and I had been left, like Elsa, and unfairly, because I hadn’t even had the chance to fail. And frightened, as if, somehow, the last door had been shut in my face.”

For the moment the picture seized him with too vivid a bitterness; he was aghast at destiny. That slender girlish body shaking with sobs while the great Bass Rocks crouched over it, like petrified primeval monsters, that body that she had not been able even to keep to herself! If he had gone to the shore instead of to Vienna that summer, and found her there, that girl of seventeen! All that would not have been, and all that would have been. All that she would have been saved—and all that he would have had!

He shrugged these thoughts away.

“Not the last door, Elizabeth. You saved yourself without my help. All that’s over. We’re here.”

He was moving towards her. Light glowed and sparkled round them; rayed out from them in a hundred flashing colors. Light and song, song and light.

And then something stopped him, cold and sudden as a steel point at his breast. The inner gong ran loud and clear, crashing through the warm, encircling brightness. Light receded. Somewhere beyond them in the dusk that was sinking upon Witch House, darkness gathered, lifted a sentient, dreadful-eyed head to strike.

“There is something wrong, Elizabeth!” His voice crackled like white fire. “Come!”

The matinee that Julia and Betty-Ann were to have attended was a double feature; the picture that they had meant to see began at ten minutes after five. But when they had made their round of the groceries and Julia had bought fish at a stall on the wharves, fog and night were coming. The streets ahead of them had faded into a haze; a gray-white vastness of cloud covered the face of the waters, blotting them out.

Julia surveyed it with knit brows.

“Looks like we’d better go home now. I never did fancy being out in a boat in a fog, and, time we got out of the show, we wouldn’t be able to see where the island was through this. There’ll be another picture tomorrow; you can probably get your mamma to take you then.”

Betty-Ann was disappointed. She would have preferred to see this particular picture. But she didn’t like the fog either. There was no sea anywhere; it looked too much as if the sky had fallen, and even now, while there was light, they would be rowing through the middle of the clouds, and couldn’t see.

And it would be nicer to go with mother and Gay tomorrow than now with Julia. Perhaps, if they went at an

evening hour, they could eat ice-cream in a drug store afterwards, and laugh and have fun together, and outside the windows people would be passing and street-lights shining, the way they used to shine back at home in Boston, when the nights were not so dark and still. She had remembered them so often and longingly, those city evenings, with the bright lights and the automobiles and the street-cars: so different from the black island-silences that always seemed full of creepy, crawly things. If she could get them to take her it would be a little like Boston; it must be.

She was already skipping with anticipation, eager to unfold her plans, when Julia brought her back through the shrouding mists to Witch House. They opened the door of the east wing living-room and found it vacant. A murmur of voices came from the inner room beyond, and Betty-Ann started towards it, but the woman stopped her.

“I remember now, your mamma was going to talk to the doctor about something. Maybe you’d better not disturb them. Couldn’t you set down here real nice and read a book?”

She left, and Betty-Ann hung her coat and hat up quietly. She would not disturb her mother and Gay, but she hoped they would soon get through talking so she could talk about tomorrow. She wondered if they would really have minded being interrupted; that was probably just a notion of Julia’s.

She got a *Little Colonel* book from the bookcase, but she could not settle down to read. The image of the white kitten kept coming between her and the pages. It had seemed so real. And if it were really out there, wandering in the corridors and deserted rooms, how hungry it must be by now, how little and lonesome and afraid!

Would it hope a little and come this way again, towards where the lights were? She opened the door to see, very softly, and called even more softly, “Kitty, kitty!” closing the door behind her, so as not to disturb Gay and her mother.

It was there. Farther down the passage, sitting very still, looking at her with its green eyes shining in its white, furry little face.

She thought of Gay’s advice and did not go towards it, only called still more softly and pleadingly. It rose and moved away down the corridor a little, then stopped and looked at her, showing its teeth as if miaowing, though no sound came.

She thought that it was afraid and yet wanted her to take it. She followed, coaxing it.

They rounded one bend in the corridor, then another.

She had not often been in this part of the house before. It was an unused labyrinth of rooms, part of the original structure; and she did not know where the light-switches were. It was getting dark. She called the kitten a little more urgently, but it did not heed.

It ran on, always keeping just a few feet ahead of her, sometimes stopping to look back at her with wide green eyes and baring its teeth appealingly in what she called a “noiseless miaow.” The kitten who was dead had had the same little trick. It shot across her mind that the little cat behaved as if it wanted to lead her somewhere; but she could not see why. It could not have kittens hidden anywhere; it was only a kitten itself.

She said softly, “What do you want, Kitty? Are you hungry? Are you so afraid you daren’t let me catch you? I wouldn’t hurt you for anything. Kitty, kitty!”

The kitten turned and looked at her and made its mute appeal of green eyes and white teeth again. But when she came towards it, it still ran on before her. She followed not too happily, hardly saving herself from stumbling sometimes. The passage—she no longer knew whether she was in the same one she had entered—was very winding; and the fog was inside the house now. It made everything misty; even the thing she pursued, the bit of white fur with the glowing green eyes, was sometimes indistinct; and it would not let her come nearer for all her soft coaxing.

She thought with a touch of trouble, “Am I disobeying Gay? Just chasing it and scaring it, making it harder to catch?”

But again it turned and miaowed soundlessly. So they went on, the kitten pausing and making its appeal whenever the child grew discouraged.

The end of the passage came within sight at last. The kitten sprinted forward suddenly and she saw a flash of white as it vanished round a door that stood ajar. It did not occur to her to wonder why that door should be ajar when all the others she had passed had been closed. She went through it, then stood in mute surprise looking round her. There was no cat anywhere. There was no sign of life in the room, only vacancy and stillness.

She was alone.

Where could the kitten have gone? There was no other door, and here in the dusk she could easily have seen its white fur gleaming. There were deep shadows all around her. Outside, the darkening fog was still grey, but inside the house it would soon be completely dark. She thought, for the first time, of where she was. She had run so far after the cat that no sound she could make, even a scream, could

be heard back in the safe and lighted rooms where people were.

She looked back. The passage lay there, black and waiting, and hazy with fog. Not pleasant to think of going back through all its winding length, by herself and without a light, past all those closed doors. What if one of them should open?

What would open it?

Her heart thumped sickeningly in her chest. It beat so hard, she could hardly think, as she stood there, her mind turning and twisting like a rabbit in a trap. The corridor would be dark, pitch dark, so that she could not see anything, before she could get back now. But she must go back. She could not stay here.

The furniture stood up very tall and straight all around her, rather threatening, casting its black shadow-selves over her like cloaks. After it got altogether dark, she would not know what that chair was, or the sofa.

She said aloud, “I’m being silly again. I’m not a baby, and Mother was so pleased—and Gay. . . .”

Where could the kitten be? If she had that warm, cuddly ball of fur to carry back in her arms, it would be a friend, something alive, a protection against the dark and the doors. She glanced at the sofa again. A thought struck her.

“If it were way back under there, against the wall, I couldn’t see it. . . .”

Recklessly risking her clean clothes, she dropped to her knees and, determinedly defying an involuntary shiver, crawled into the black pocket underneath the sofa. But her exploring hands found nothing: not even a squeak or the touch of a flying tail.

She crawled out and to her feet again, her frightened eyes fixed on the doorway. She did not know what suddenly made her turn her head.

Aunt Sarai was standing just behind her, not a yard away, the big amethysts glittering on her skinny, out-stretched fingers, her eyes as glittering in her yellow, wrinkled face, as they quietly watched the child.

When Gaylord Carew entered the living-room the lighted lamp apprised him that someone had been in the room since he and Elizabeth had left it.

Vacancy and a lighted lamp.

Elizabeth's eyes, wide as if startled suddenly from sleep, had been caught by the mist-blanketed windows.

"Fog! And Betty-Ann out—"

But Carew had opened the closet door, seen the coat and hat within.

"No," his words were quick and crisp, "she's not out in the fog. I wish she were."

"You mean—" The dark eyes were changed, fiery pits of fear, but he had already strode past her to the passage-door and flung it open now. His voice rang through the corridor's black length like a bell, clear and imperative, challenging the silence.

"Betty-Ann! Betty-Ann!"

But only the black stillness answered him, the quiet, dense blackness that seemed to enter and creep towards them through the open door.

He plunged out into it, calling over his shoulder, "Stay here and call Julia. Find out how long ago she brought Betty-Ann back!"

But she did not. She followed him as he hurried down the corridor, calling her child's name again and again in that ringing authoritative voice.

He did not follow the corridor towards the main living- and dining-rooms; he turned aside where it bisected. There, in the old unused rooms, something could most easily happen.

And then, ahead of them, they heard a scream.

Sharp with the agony of a horror beyond imagining, shrill in its ghastly appeal for salvation, it rang through the dark old halls like a death-scream: weirdly awful with the anguish of a danger greater than death, of abduction beyond that of the body. Carew flung out his own voice in answer, as though it were a living thing that could reach her through the dark.

"Betty-Ann! Betty-Ann!"

There were more screams in answer; the sound of flying feet. As they rounded the last bend in the corridor they collided with her, a small, clutching, shrieking thing whose face was no longer human. When Carew lifted her her fingers closed on him like little steel vises but the wide eyes did not see him.

Then, as later, when Elizabeth held her in her arms and coaxed and reassured her as she lay on the couch in the lighted living-room, the blue eyes that seemed to stare fixedly outwards were really staring *inwards.* Some picture seared through her eyeballs into the mysterious space behind made the lights, the room around her, her mother's face, dim details hazy as fog, beyond that burning etching.

Only Carew's voice seemed sometimes to reach her, as it had reached into that dark room where she stood alone before Aunt Sarai. It had pierced those horrible moments

that she was still living; had its part in them and she could hear it now.

When he laid his hand over the wide eyes and repeated over and over, *"Sleep,"* they finally closed.

It was while she lay in hypnosis that he questioned her and learned what had happened. After that he sent her into deeper sleep.

She woke at eight and lay white and shivering but in the present, her mind no longer a bound puppet re-enacting its part on the stage of that dark, haunted room. They gave her broth and she drank it, and stared more hungrily at the blazing electric lights.

"You'll keep them all on, won't you? All night long."

Carew and Elizabeth exchanged a dismayed glance over her head. He shook his.

Elizabeth said, "If we did you couldn't go to sleep, Dear. And this was only another dream—like the hare. If Aunt Sarai had really been in there, she could have caught you before you could get to the door."

Hysteria threatened, even through the thick bonds of weakness and exhaustion. The child's hands shook; her voice, that had not the strength for a scream, quavered.

"But I wasn't asleep; I was awake. She didn't mean to catch me; she was only scaring me this time until she gets ready—" the weak voice broke and trailed off in an eerie anguished wail.

Carew signed with his lips, "Turn them out after she has gone to sleep."

But at eleven he was called down to a crying child and a white-faced, tense Elizabeth. Another will gripped Betty-

Ann’s mind more strongly than his now; his mesmeric commands, repeated that evening, could no longer ensure sleep. As soon as Elizabeth had turned off the lights, Betty had awakened and taken her mother’s long-gowned silhouette for Aunt Sarai’s. Voice and returning lights had hardly been enough to reassure her. She was wailing with outraged trust as well as terror now.

“I can’t go to sleep. I daren’t go to sleep. I can’t go to sleep ever again.” She sobbed. “Not if you’re going to turn the lights out as soon as I do! Do you want her to get me?” The sobs were growing more frantic.

“We don’t,” Carew said, his voice positive and warmly comforting, “and she won’t.”

Elizabeth flung out her hands in a hopeless gesture.

“She can’t rest, with those ceiling lights glaring into her eyes; she was so restless all the time, but we can’t go on like this. I’ve offered to keep the lamp on the stand lit all night.”

“It lets the shadows in! And it’s only one bulb; it might burn out. And then the whole dark would get in—” Betty’s teeth were chattering.

Carew said, with abrupt decision. “Would you take your things, go up to my room tonight, Elizabeth, and leave her with me? I’m sure it would be best.” He added in French, “Trust me this once more, and don’t tell anyone that we have temporarily exchanged rooms! I should prefer it so if it can be managed; walls seem to have eyes as well as ears, here.”

She looked straight and long into his eyes, and then gathered up her clothes and went in silence.

Betty-Ann was demanding nervously, “What were you saying that I couldn’t understand? Are you going to try to

fool me again about the lights?”

“I’m not going to fool you; I’m sorry about that. I’m going to turn them off now, when you know about it.”

She screamed sharply as his hand touched the light-switch. But the rayless, blanketing dark was cool and soft as well as hideously black; and his voice came through it, warm and steady and comforting, “Nothing’s going to hurt you, Betty. I shouldn’t have turned the lights out if it would. And I’m here.”

Still screaming she beat his chest with the temper born of terror when he lay down upon the bed still warm from Elizabeth’s presence and took her in his arms. But he paid no heed to that; he was as imperturbable as the dark itself. He stroked her hair and hot forehead and repeated, gently, quietly, his command to her to sleep.

She was too young for the method to require consciously mesmeric aid. It was after she was asleep that Carew’s powers were really tested. He himself was continually conscious of an Unseen Watcher. The room was dark now, totally dark, too dark for the dangerous half-light that aids materializations; he wondered if instinct had not warned Betty-Ann against the lamp.

But at the windows there were touches of moon-silver twilight. Presently they enabled him to distinguish, between the bed and the windows, something darker than the darkness—the skirted silhouette of a woman. He knew the shape and the folds in which the dress fell; he had seen them in Aunt Sarai’s portrait in the drawing-room. Each detail appeared gradually now, thickening and blackening into perfection, out of the nebulous darkness.

As the Thing grew more distinct Betty-Ann grew restless, moaned and shivered and he had to lay his hand on her

forehead and speak definitely hypnotic commands, sending her into deeper sleep.

He himself slept then, ordering that deeper consciousness which never ceases, as the selves we know when waking cease in sleep, to awaken him at need.

Three quarters of an hour later it did. The form had moved nearer, stood only a few feet from the bed, and Betty-Ann was moaning, her eyes still closed, and throwing out her hands towards it. Once again he quieted her sleep.

And so on, throughout the night.

It was a vigil that would have exhausted any man whose nerves were not steel to the horror of that figure; who had not trained himself to sleep and wake at will. But Carew managed to obtain all the rest he needed, if not all he could have used. And the morning that found Betty-Ann whole and uninjured after those hours in the dark found her a little abashed also; Gay had been right again; Aunt Sarai hadn’t come.

And found Carew wondering if his sleep-giving power would hold when, as within three or four nights it must, the full moon should give that watching figure the semblance of flesh as well as shadow. He also wondered how and why the dagger that had carried death to Hugh Stone had vanished from the table on which he had left it when he had had his presentiment of danger.

Anyone might have entered the room while he and Elizabeth had been searching for Betty-Ann, but something told him that no one had.

The next evening Quincy Lee called on his cousin.

The hour was before dinner, while Carew and Betty-Ann were on the beach, and Elizabeth alone.

He knocked at the living-room door, and asked if she were dressing. She answered that she was not, but she stood so that her figure squarely blocked the door she opened. He laughed.

“If you’d condescend to let me in, Elizabeth, we could talk. There are things I could tell you, things I’m afraid you need to know.”

She raised her brows. “About Betty-Ann?”

“No. I’m sorry I’ve devilled you so about the kid, Elizabeth; I never believed all I said; you know well enough that I couldn’t. This is serious.”

“Come in.” She stepped back and sat down, coolly and gravely considering rather than welcoming him, and he took a seat in his turn. She was on her guard; Quincy, with this air of bluff apology, of friendly frankness, was never to be trusted. She had learned that well and painfully, before she was as old as Betty-Ann.

He had expected her to question him but she waited until his patience broke and he was the first to speak.

“It’s like this, Elizabeth. You won’t like to hear it—you never like to hear anything I say, and this time you’ve got some reason—but if you like this doctor-fellow, you’d better send him away.”

“Why?” The single syllable was as cool and hard as a stone dropping into a pool.

“Because it isn’t safe for him here. You wouldn’t want him to go as Hugh Stone went, would you?” He struck her with the words as if they had been a fist, and she whitened; but her voice was tranquil and even.

“Why isn’t it safe for him?”

Quincy appeared to grope for words.

“He doesn’t fit in here. He doesn’t seem to do anything, but he upsets everything, he’s quiet; you wouldn’t dream quietness could burn so, like fire. It wouldn’t do, even if it were only for Betty-Ann you wanted him. I don’t know whether it is or not, but if it isn’t—then he’s as damned unsafe as a man could be.”

There was something sulphurous about him: a sense of poisonous, unclean heat; it seemed to lick out towards her in little flames. She remembered that same sense of heat around him just before Joseph and he had fought, on that evening long ago. She tried to close her consciousness against it, said with a curl of her lips, “I see: you are afraid for the inheritance—yours and Joseph’s; you think I might like Dr. Carew. Are you being melodramatic enough to threaten him?”

“Not I. I’m a married man.” Quincy laughed shortly. “I’ve got a wife, even if I happen to like you better. But Joseph never had any luck getting you out of his blood either. And Joseph is not married.”

“What do you mean?”

“That it isn’t healthy to be your husband, Elizabeth. Or your lover. You cheated destiny once, but you didn’t get away with it; now Joe seems to be the predestined man. If I were in his shoes, I might put up a fight, too. Though I may be talking nonsense; unless he intended very dirty work—and Joe’s always plumed himself on subtlety—the doctor would have been allowed to keep Li Wan’s knife.”

“Li Wan’s knife . . .?”

“Yes. That knife that killed Stone was the one Li Wan killed herself with, her divine uncle’s. Your father never saw it; it came over from France and the two sets of

heirlooms must have got mixed in the attic somehow. Joe and I never quite liked to ask you what you'd done with it, but Carew came to my rooms this morning and asked me if I'd seen it; advised me not to keep it if I found it; said it was a dangerous thing to have around." He laughed wolfishly. "I suppose he thought I'd use it."

She stared at him, not quite understanding, but feeling as if her blood itself were whitening under a slow creeping chill of horror.

"If the knife is found again, it is your property, of course, and Joseph's; I have no right to it. I didn't know that it had gone."

"A lot of things go here. I tell you, Elizabeth, the doctor himself will have to go—in one way or another."

He was staring straight into her eyes, but she was proof against his gaze; she was not Zoia. Yet she was confused. His voice cried like the many voices that had been dinning into her inner ears night and day through these many nights and days. *Danger to any man to be loved by you. Remember Hugh! Remember Hugh!* That voice, grown loud and coarse, sounding at last in the ears of her flesh. Her mind raced, trying to pierce to the thought behind that aura of sulphurous flames.

"You would not say this for Dr. Carew's sake or mine. You would say it if you meant to strike at him and blame Joseph. Or if you did not mean to strike—only to frighten me into sending him away."

He stiffened; she felt the fire flash out for one second, towards her, blazing.

"So that's all the thanks I get, Elizabeth! Well, I expected it; you never liked me. But if Carew stays, it's yourself and him you'll hurt. It's murder to keep him here."

That night, as Carew was passing under the great chandelier in the dining-room, it fell. A second's swerve saved him; the great crystal mass brushed his shoulder as it crashed down to shatter in a thousand fragments upon the floor. Betty-Ann and Zoia screamed; Elizabeth stood white and silent. There was no discoverable reason for the accident; they made very little pretense that it was an accident. Joseph, coming forward to examine the ruin that still winked and sparkled like a live thing at Carew's feet, straightened up with a shrug and a laugh.

"The house is active again. It's lucky you have eyes in the top of your head, Carew; otherwise it would have been smashed like an eggshell." He was watching his brother with a covert smile.

Betty-Ann burst into frantic sobs. "It's trying to get you now! It's trying to get *you!* Aunt Sarai's mad because you wouldn't let her get me!"

He laughed a little; casually pushed aside some shards of crystal with his foot as he went to her. The gesture was theatre: designed to impress the chandelier's inanimate futility upon her mind, ridicule and lessen its dark aura. His voice had sunk to its most melting notes when he put his hand on her shoulder.

"This was only an accident. It would have been a very clumsy attempt to kill me. I'm still decidedly alive."

"But they *said* it was awfully queer it didn't get you!" She was past all control of herself now: shocked and startled as if from unguessable heights of heaven a blackness had fallen and only been swerved by a hair's breadth from putting out the sun. There was nothing safe in all the world now. Gay was threatened, Gay whose voice had come to her there in the dark where she cowered before Aunt Sarai, its

warm living strength calling her back to the lighted world where things were safe and alive and kind. Terrible to think of that voice still, of him cold and still, got by Aunt Sarai. She cried and could not be checked.

“I can’t stop, Gay! I love you so! You ought to go away, but if you do, they’ll get me, and if you don’t, they’ll get me because they’ll kill you first!”

He saw, as he picked her up, the cold faint smile on Joseph’s face, felt the sullen fierce bafflement that streamed out like lava from Quincy.

Later, when Betty was asleep, Elizabeth faced him in her living-room. Her lovely young face looked hard in the lamplight: a white mask without expression. ,

“I’m sorry, Dr. Carew, but I must ask you to go. Tomorrow. It’s no use your staying on.”

He said bluntly, “No. If I were driven off the scene, her faith in Aunt Sarai’s omnipotence would be complete. You know what the end would be.”

He had aimed straight. He saw her flinch and the white stiff calm of her face break up in agony.

“I’m afraid I do know. But I have no right to ask you to die for her.”

“Nor to ask me to let *her* die. If Betty-Ann were at the point of death and I the only doctor within reach, professional duty would make me go to her through storm, or any danger to my life, whether you had called me or not. You exaggerate your responsibilities and forget mine. And there are worse things than dying here.”

“They won’t come to her. I would kill her and myself first.”

She said it soberly, without consciousness of drama. It was the thing deep-buried but ever-present; the spectre

that had lurked in the farthest background of her mind that night when he had found her in the dark outside Witch House. He saw, in the light of it, what was her full and final reaction to Witch House.

She saw something in his eyes and smiled.

“You are surprised; you shouldn’t be. You use the knife so well, Gay, you should expect some rather ugly things to come to light. But I am not mad enough for that yet. It is no use, I suppose; you’ll stay whatever I say or do. I could fight you better if I were not Betty-Ann’s mother, but I am.”

Two more days and nights: a white bead and a black bead; a white and then again a black. Nights through which Carew slept and watched beside Betty-Ann and that dark form in the shadows watched and did not sleep. The second night he thought he caught the glitter of eyes under the black patch that was its forehead; soon, as the moon waxed and the moonlight, creeping into the room, bleached the darkness, the time would come when he would see Its face.

The third day was sun-bathed, soft with spring. Elizabeth granted Betty-Ann’s old wish: at noon they picnicked on the beach and made a nest of blankets on the still-chilled sands and were headily and wholly happy.

They had no inclination to go in; it was too pleasant to sit there, drinking in the wine of sun and spring. It was one of those intervals when breathing is sheer, full satisfaction to the senses. Yesterday and tonight and tomorrow had no being, were as things that never had been or would be.

Then, when the afternoon was at its gold-drenched stillest, Quincy and Zoia Lee came, emerging silently as shadows from the rocks.

“Hello? You people still out here?” Quincy greeted them. “Well, I don’t wonder. It’s too fine a day to be wasted inside.” He was smiling, but there was still that sense of heat about him, as of some unclean flame fed in a dark place, away from all clean and safe and normal things.

The beach was not private property. Family dissensions, even permanent estrangements, should not be carried too far. They made room for Quincy and Zoia on the edge of the blankets. Talk fluttered warmly and amiably over the suddenly opened cold depths beneath.

Zoia fluttered also. Too much to stay on the blankets. She rose and walked about the beach. Carew followed her, leaving Quincy intent on talk with Elizabeth. There was a sense of crying need about the Russian woman: ever since she came, her thoughts had been summoning him, clearly, insistently, as bells, while her husband lurked in ambush behind his mask.

On his feet, too, Carew could watch Betty-Ann, who, not liking the company, had excused herself to play somewhere farther down the beach. No danger probably; but while Quincy was there with his unknown purposes it might be as well to keep an eye on Betty-Ann. His innocence of some of the tricks that had been played upon her was not certain, in view of Elizabeth’s story of his fight with Joseph, though he could never have been capable of projecting his consciousness far enough beyond his body to have timed with such exquisite and cruel accuracy those nerve-shattering falls of the chessmen.

Zoia was talking, laughing nervously and casting glances at the pair upon the blankets. “I am not well lately. I wonder if you could help me, Doctor; I’m not like Betty-Ann, but I, too, need some attention.”

He thought she looked as if she did. Her face, colorless and haggard under the paint, had lines that had not been there when he had first come to Witch House. Then it had been only a vapid waxen mask; now it was worn, as though something preyed upon it.

The flame that burned in Quincy?

He asked, looking at her dark-rimmed eyes, “You do not sleep?”

She shivered. “No. I do not want to sleep any more. I sleep too much already. It is so cold, where Quincy sends me in my sleep. Deep into the house, farther in, not into the house we see. It is as if that house were a face, and when you see a face you can’t see the brain or the thoughts of the person behind it. And it is so strange—the house inside the house.”

He asked quietly, “Would your husband want you to tell me all this? He is not very far off.”

She laughed shrilly and caught his arm as if afraid that he would run away. Her teeth showed, cat-like, in a queer little spasm of hate as she glanced back at the other man and woman.

“He will not hear us. Not when he has her to talk to! He is jealous when you are with her. Oh, he will do you a mischief some day! But he is not jealous of me.”

Carew felt a sharp pang of pity. She loved Quincy, the little malformed soul; he loomed so huge to her littleness, to her he had a dark dignity, the power and splendor of evil; and she was of the women who bow down to idols. Queer survival of the ego in uttermost abasement! She could kiss the trampling foot with a pervert’s sensual pleasure, satisfied and flattered that it cared to trample only her. In the light of that love her hatred of Elizabeth was a pitiful

and natural thing: the unprized, used tool's resentment of the prized goal.

He said gently, "Does he send you out of yourself—into these sleeps—often?"

"He always has. Before we were married he told me I should be his crystal, and I was glad and proud to think that I could help *his* vision so. But it always hurt me. And now he sends me out often and often. He is afraid since you came, afraid that *she* may love you, and he makes me help him—I, who want him to love me, not her. He does not care if it kills me now; he sends me out so far. When *I* wake up I am cold, so cold that I feel as if I could never get warm again. And I do not, all day long."

He could feel her fingers trembling on his arm, trembling as if indeed with great cold. He checked horrified anger and pity; he had no intention of allowing the eyes of his mind to be clouded.

"How is it strange—this that you call the house inside the house?"

She said vaguely, her eyes growing glassy, "Strange. Shapes change, and sizes. The rooms are different: bigger and blacker and longer and the shadows are full of things. Creatures—Or sometimes the rooms get smaller, fewer, and the furnishings change and change, like the scenes in a kaleidoscope, and I see the people in the portraits walking about in them."

They were nearer the cliffs now. The rocky ramparts were very high here; their tops accessible only by crossing from the lower, less steep cliffs at the island's farther end. The stony wall cast a great black shadow before them, a black wall of ethereal menace blotting out the sun.

Carew heard his own voice speaking to the woman, and he wished that he had more than questions to give her. But he did not think that anyone on earth could offer her much help. Betty-Ann, throwing stones into the sea down yonder, was far more of a person; some day she would grow up; what hung upon his arm here never would in this life.

“What does your husband hope to gain by this?”

She seemed to feel a little caution then. She glanced back towards Quincy Lee and saw that he was rising, and she whispered to Carew.

“He wants to find out just what it is that lives in the house that is built on the other plane. And he wants to go back into the memories of the house on this one. I have seen Li Wan open her veins and paint symbols on the walls of the house with her blood as she died. And he has made me go farther back, to find Joseph de Quincy and his wife. He has made me watch to see how that Joseph did things. He wants power; he wants to learn; or to reach those who can teach him.—He is coming towards us! Let us walk on—farther towards the cliffs!”

She was tugging at Carew’s arm, but he did not follow. She darted on, deeper into the blackness, and turned and called to him with her light, nervous laughter, “Dr. Carew! Dr. Carew!”

He stayed where he was, his face impassive, watchful. “I prefer the sun, Mrs. Lee; you’ll get chilled in there.”

Quincy was indeed coming toward them. The position of the sun made his face a shadow where Carew stood, but his eyes showed in it, a faint yellow gleam. There was purpose behind his walk.

Elizabeth, too, was on her feet; for a moment she had seemed uncertain whether or not to follow, but now she

came on in the man’s wake.

Zoia looked upwards toward the cliff-top; round a projecting spur of rock that presented a solid wall from where the others stood. What she saw seemed to startle her, for she screamed suddenly and shrilly.

“Joseph! Joseph! *Don’t!”*

Automatically Carew’s body started to spring forward. The bell of warning clanged through some space within him, nearer and sharper than her cry. He stood still, even as Quincy dived forward with a smothered curse; and he saw that sweat was running down Quincy’s face, and that the man’s eyes were starting out, as though with great strain and labor, leisurely as he walked.

“Carew! Quick! My brother—

Zoia screamed again, shaking as if an invisible force had suddenly grasped her, her face twisting in a strange convulsion.

“It is not Joseph, Quincy! I’ll tell them who it really is—” Her husband started, his face going blank with amazement, then he sprang toward her with a furious, gasping curse.

Then the rocks moved.

Far up on the projecting brow of the cliff a stone moved, fell, dislodging and carrying down a train of others in its wake. The stones rained; fell, in that radius of a few feet, like a titanic hail.

Carew called, his voice sharp as a whiplash, “Stop Betty-Ann, Elizabeth! Don’t let her see anything! Get her back to the house and call a doctor! I’m not a surgeon.”

He saw Elizabeth intercept the child who was running down the beach toward them, staring-eyed, and lead her away. He went back and lifted off the stones. They were

curiously warm, not cold, like other stones under the pale spring sun.

Warm with the warmth of the higher energies of a man's body, those subtle forces used in telekinesis. Warm with Quincy's own life, and they had made his body forever cold. For there was nothing to be done for Quincy. One of the larger fragments had struck his head; he had fallen without a sound, would make none again. But Zoia was still breathing; feeling over her crushed body on which the first stone had fallen, Carew did not think that she would long keep life.

When Elizabeth came back with Joseph and the servants, they wrapped Zoia in the blankets and carried her back to the house, laid her in a bed to wait for the doctor from the mainland. She was conscious now; by laying his hands on her body and giving mesmeric commands Carew withheld pain.

Once he said, "We were walking toward the cliffs all the time that you, talked; I was expected to be too interested and stirred to notice that; since I did, Quincy had to come and help his plan along. Was that it?"

She said dully, obedient to mental command as she had been all her sad life long, "Yes. He gave me orders when I was asleep. He told me I could tell you about all the things he did to me; that perhaps you could make me feel better—as you did Betty-Ann. But he told me to lure you to that place under the cliffs, too; to cry out that I saw Joseph above me."

"Joseph was not there?"

"There was no one there. Joseph was in the library with a new book when we went out; Quincy thought it would keep him there, alone, till evening, so he could not prove he had

not killed you. Only I didn’t know that he meant to kill me, too.”

“What made you cry out that it was not Joseph, that you would tell us who it really was? Did you decide you would not help him after all?”

“No. I would always have helped Quincy. Something else made me say that—made me say it when I saw you would not walk into the trap. I don’t know who.”

“Someone who was not Quincy?”

“Someone else.” She spoke quite tonelessly those two words that were her last.

The doctor from the mainland came and went. Silence settled over the island again, like a displaced curtain falling back in thickened, heavier folds.

For there was a different quality in the silence now. It had tasted something, rich food on which it had long been thinly rationed. Shadowy things were trooping up, called by that scent of blood, like flies that smell carrion. They were not strangers to the old house; they had been ill-fed and at a distance, now they were hungry and avid and near.

“Not a good storm to raise unless one can ride it,” Carew thought. And wondered, with some sadness, if he had left undone anything that he might have done. An adult should not stand by while a child plays with matches, and he had known that Quincy Lee was not big enough for the shoes of a wizard of Witch House.

He found himself, ironically enough, pitying and admiring a little the man’s stubborn, misguided ambition. All his life both Joseph and Elizabeth had mocked him; yet he had tried so hard to learn to be strong, cunning, wise in evil, to

attain the highest objectives he could see. There was worth in such persistence, some use for it somewhere. Only first it would have to be stripped of much that encumbered it now. Would this swift disaster help to hasten that stripping? Carew shrugged and doubted it. The man had burned himself up in his own fire, and yet he might still be wondering how, feeling cheated.

It must have seemed so perfect, the plan. To sweep three obstacles from his path at one blow, destroying one rival and the woman who barred himself from the race, and laying their destruction at the door of the man whose jealousy of Carew would seem to have a much more obvious motive than his own. Elizabeth was the one person who could have seen through his legally flawless alibi, and he had done his best to prepare Elizabeth's mind.

But it had not worked. The woman who had loved him had been the instrument of his destruction, her own avenger. That cry that he had striven to silence had lured him into the hail of his own making, into the trap he had set. He had died under the stones that his own super-physically projected energies had loosed; that was the best and the worst that his own nature could have let come to him.

Yet for the woman Carew knew a certain regret. She had been sincere in her appeal for his help, even while half-consciously she knew that she was being allowed to make it only to lure him to his death. He did not blame her for that; he knew that hypnosis cannot make a man or a woman violate his or her moral instincts, but he did not expect much of that weak fibre that long since had been utterly yielded to and degraded by Quincy's foul rites. Yet did that appeal for help mean that she could have received it, in

however infinitesimal a quantity? That he had been too absorbed in guarding himself to give it?

“He owes her a debt. When and where, and in what coin, will he pay it, I wonder? And I am fortunate if I do not owe her a debt also. It is better not to make debts.”

He left his room and rounded the first bend in the long hall that crept through all the second storey of Witch House like a snake. He knocked at Joseph de Quincy’s door.

The other man greeted him with a fleeting smile on his lean, darkly fine face.

“So you see now what’s in even the dregs of witch’s blood, Carew? My brother was a bungler; he messed up the job, or you’d have been stiff by now, and I as good as so. But it’s in all of us; we can’t escape. Not even Elizabeth, though she spends her life running away.”

“That is a convenient excuse for indulging your worst instincts, isn’t it?” Carew sat down, uninvited. “A good cudgel to bludgeon your cousin’s brain with, too, whenever you’re afraid she may break free. But it won’t work; we’re the masters of our blood, not it of us. We can forgive a lame man for not walking as fast as a sound one; but we can’t forgive him for not trying to walk.”

Joseph’s teeth showed in white and flashing mockery.

“Is that a warning, Carew, or are you merely preaching at me? I hardly thought you banal enough for that.”

“Call it preaching. The word defines three things: superstitious rant, a genuine attempt at self-expression, and telling truth that the hearers do not want to hear. You don’t want to hear truth, except the sections of it that you can find a way to fit into your own scheme of things.”

“I can say the same of you, Carew. I walk in my own way; you’ve hardly the right to call me lame because I choose a

different direction from yours."

"There's only one direction, eventually. You and I both know enough to know that. And that the doctrines of free will and predestination are not incompatible. Only we *will* the things that happen to us over a longer period than we know, and the destination isn't doom: it's salvation. Or what superstitious people call salvation; I call it godhood."

"But you and I don't agree on the definition of godhood; you think it can be achieved only by outgrowing the desire to play with toys that God Himself still plays with—the weak. In His case, ourselves. I am not sure that we shall all attain it; bunglers like Quincy and dreamers like you may fall into Peer Gynt's casting-ladle by the way; so much spirit good only as raw metal, to be melted up and made into new individuals. You were trying to frighten me when you spoke of what we'd willed controlling our destinies for longer than we'd expected. Karma?"

"Cause and effect. Has it never occurred to you that you and Quincy have held substantially the same ideals and ambitions?—that you're only coarse and clear-cut copies of the same coin? The finer tools you work with will end by getting you into an infinitely worse mess. And like him, you want something you can never have."

"Elizabeth? But I *can* have her. Don't pretend, or let her pretend to you, Carew; she and I are spiritually as well as physically akin. She's an individual and she's let that fact cut her loose from the Quincy pattern; but she's a Quincy and she'll find in the end that the only way to express her whole self is to release it, not suppress it."

Carew smiled grimly.

"No. When you speak of being a Quincy you mean a certain spiritual condition. But Elizabeth is outgrowing

that. I do not know what has been between you in the past," he spoke of something further back than the island and Witch House, and the other man, to whom his thoughts were deliberately opened, knew it, "but it is at an end. It may be strong and hard to break away from; you might be able to drag her back into it for this life, but not for many lives. Since she has once conceived the desire to escape, she will. You have already lost her; you can only fight a delaying battle."

Joseph laughed. Suddenly and coldly: a blast of ice as venomous as any heat.

"You are not telling even unwanted truth this time, Carew. Elizabeth is herself; she can't escape from herself, or me. Escape is a dream; and if it were not I tell you I should make the process long and slow."

There was about him, as he stood so, a force like that of the cliff-walls upon the seashore, as dark and hard and impassive, and yet infinitely fiery, infinitely alive. The man was *force;* he loomed there like a dark power, clothed in flesh: warmed but not weakened, never softened.

Carew rose. The effect, had there been a watcher, was like that of a ray of light suddenly shot athwart the darkness of the room. Tall as the other, he stood facing him, dark eyes meeting dark eyes.

"We all three remain ourselves," he said, and left the room.

Quincy Lee and Zoia, his wife, were spending their last night in Witch House. They had been brought back from the undertaker's parlor and lay in state in the old drawing-room, candles burning at their heads and feet. Aunt Sarai's

painted eyes looked down upon them with inscrutable malevolence; so one year ago, those eyes had looked down upon herself so laid and light-encircled, the open-eyed mask on the mantel more her own than the still, vacated one in the casket.

People had been coming and going throughout the afternoon. There had not been much friendship between the island and the mainland, yet a few connections and old acquaintances had felt it duty or policy to offer condolences. Joseph and Elizabeth received them; Carew stayed with Betty-Ann.

She had not been, would not be, in that room where the candles burned and the dead watched the dead. The tragedy had not upset her much. There had been shock at first, and a few tears over the queerness of never seeing Cousin Quincy and Cousin Zoia anywhere again. But she had never wanted to see them anywhere anyway; and the east wing made an oasis where all funereal gloom was kept away from her.

Carew, who understood the use of mental and emotional vibrations, made an atmosphere for it, sunny and even, whelming the dark telepathic currents of the main house. Sometimes he even told her tales of the more fantastic side of Eastern culture and magic: of monks who make visible, half-tangible mental images of their gods to keep them company in their hermit cells; of one wealthy, less unwordly abbot who set such a phantasm to guard his treasures.

Only once, for a few moments on that last evening, Carew and Joseph and Elizabeth stood in the drawing-room with that silent trio.

“Three dead and three living,” Joseph commented, with a quirkish lift of his eyebrows. “Even numbers. I wonder how

soon they will be changed?”

Carew made no answer. Elizabeth said, without a shudder, but with clear aversion, “Don’t talk like that, Joseph.”

Joseph shrugged. “Don’t begrudge me my joke, my dear. I shall not have a joking night. I shall have to pass it in here, changing the candles and keeping them lit. I’d as soon the Puritan prejudice against popish abominations had lasted long enough to keep the Quincys from re-instituting this one of their foreign customs. It would have saved me a night’s sleep.”

She was regarding him from beneath level brows, her eyes earnest and a little sympathetic. “Why don’t you break the custom, Joseph? It is absurd, after all, to be slaves to what our ancestors did.”

He laughed. “I prefer not to break customs unless they seriously inconvenience me; there’s strength in them. I admit I do not like staying up all night for Quincy; he would have done it with much more satisfaction for me. If you are really sympathetic you might stay with me, Bess, and share the vigil according to traditional precedent. If the doctor,” he lifted his brows again and glanced at Carew, “would not mind looking after Betty-Ann for one night?”

Elizabeth shook her head. “I’m sorry, Joseph; but I don’t want to make any breaks in Betty-Ann’s routine.” Her mind was blank; had her cousin been reading her thoughts he could not have read the lie there: that she could have come down to him from Carew’s room without disturbing Betty-Ann.

He shrugged again. “Well, perhaps you’re prudent. The night might be interesting.” He was standing at the head of his brother’s coffin, and he smiled down at the corpse. The

local undertaker had not been skilful enough to do much for the crushed head; the disfigured face looked weirder and more monstrous for the efforts that had been made to patch the smashed features with wax.

"He's not been dead long enough for the silver cord that holds us to our bodies to be severed; and he was never fond of me; he might come back. He'd be a pretty sight if he got up now." He chuckled slightly.

Elizabeth laughed, nervously and impatiently. "Joseph, you're incorrigible. I shall lock my door."

"Will you?" His eyes, reflecting a little the sparkle of the tapers on either side of him, mocked her. She made an abrupt gesture and turned away.

"Come, Dr. Carew."

Joseph stood quietly between the candles, watching them go.

Outside in the hall, Elizabeth's eyes softened, troubled. "I wish he were not going to stay in that room all night, Gay. I don't see Quincy coming back into his body, but he did hate him; I should not think it would be healthy to stay in there boxed up with all that hate. Quincy was cleverer than I ever thought. When I heard that first scream of Zoia's I was sure that he had been right—that Joseph was up there, trying to murder you, and, incidentally, her, in order to preserve the appearance of an accidental rock-slide. I never should have been sure, since Quincy was killed, too, that she had given that second cry of her own volition, if I hadn't met Joseph when I was half-way back to the house; he'd have had no time to get back from the cliffs. I felt ashamed."

Carew smiled a little. "I don't think you need worry. I am sure that your cousin can take care of himself whenever he pleases."

She looked at him with eyes that widened a little. “Just what do you mean?”

Carew said quietly, “Only what I’ve learned from your story and from watching him. He plays Providence to himself. Most of us do, to a certain extent, when we can.”

She glanced at him rather keenly, but asked nothing more. He did not pay much heed; he was looking out through the windows at the night that was exquisitely clear, almost darkly crystalline, like a set stage. Tonight would be full moon.

IV

Betty-Ann slept soundly through the forepart of the night; it was after midnight that trouble came upon her. She became conscious then, though compared to waking consciousness, her state was as fog compared to sun. And in those mists whose blur covered all things, two people, or two sets of hands to which she saw no faces, grasped her and struggled: one to hold her fast and keep her where she was, and other to tear her away. She was not conscious enough to feel horror or great fear; but she did feel distress, and it was uncomfortable to be pulled this way and that; she tried to scream, but could make no sound.

Then the hands that tugged at her jerked her free of the others, and, simultaneously, seemed themselves to melt into thin air. She lay alone but somehow not relieved, entirely conscious now except that she had no impulse to move or even think but lay entirely passive, and knew that it was in her own bed she lay. The mists were gone.

And she saw now as never in all her life she had seen. Walls were no limits to her vision. She saw through the bedroom walls into the dark quiet living-room beyond, and through its walls down the dark winding passages along which the white kitten had to led her to Aunt Sarai. She saw all through the east wing, all through the first floor of the main house, dark still room upon dark still room, into the drawing-room that gleamed before her like a lighted window. She saw the two caskets and the candles burning

more and more feebly about them, the melting wax running down their long slim sides like perspiration, and she thought that the candles were sweating with fear of Aunt Sarai, who sat on the mantel and looked down, her eyes smiling horribly and her claw-like hands in her lap.

Betty-Ann was afraid to look at Aunt Sarai's eyes. Even with the distance of the house between them, it was as if those eyes might burn up all that distance if they once met hers. But when she looked away from the mantel she could only look at the caskets; and that was not nice, either. Cousin Zoia lay with eyes closed, quite still and ordinary, as if asleep; but Cousin Quincy's face was queer and horrible, hardly like a face at all; and she felt as if he were not asleep, but still there and angry, so that his anger threw out heat all around the casket.

She thought, "I s'pose it's hard for Cousin Quincy to go to sleep and leave when he's so mad. He can't move either; and he hates that."

And then she forgot him, for in the portrait Aunt Sarai had moved. Her folded hands had opened, and the claw-like fingers were closing on the arms of her pictured chair. She stood upright, *rising out of the portrait,* and stepped down upon the mantel. Betty-Ann saw her head come out of the background of the picture and rise up a little above it, as she stood up straight. Then she jumped down from the mantel to the floor. Without raising her skirts or visibly moving her legs, all in one piece, she came down. It was a completely dignified jump and yet completely horrible.

She walked forward, past the casket, towards the drawingroom door. Betty-Ann could see her shoes come out from under her skirts and the skirts fall over them again. As she rounded the last casket, Cousin Quincy's, she went

so near one of the candles that Betty-Ann thought irrelevantly, as if someone had whispered it in her ear, “What if her skirts knock it over?”

Then black wings seemed to touch her, draining out her life, hungrily pressing her down, far down, into a measureless abyss, and, when she struggled up out of the dizziness and darkness and the mists, Aunt Sarai was walking through the drawingroom door into the hall beyond. The drawing-room became invisible behind her.

Betty-Ann thought, *“She is coming here!”*

She then tried indeed to scream but could not; tried to move and spring out of bed, but could not. It was as if her body had been turned to stone and her mind were locked up in it, churning with terror but helpless, utterly helpless to do anything. Only her heart was alive; it pounded so hard it hurt her chest, like blows.

Aunt Sarai came on, down the hall. Each section of the hall, and each room and door vanished as she passed it. She walked steadily, purposefully, without ever hurrying or hesitating. The smiling evil in her eyes did not change and they gleamed a little red in the silvery twilight. Her hands, with the big sparkling amethysts on them, were at her sides. Betty-Ann knew when they would rise; when the old woman came into the bedroom, towards her.

And she tried again to scream, but her stone throat would not let her. She could not move; she lay fast bound, and Aunt Sarai came on.

She came so dreadfully, so quietly. Although the noises of the house were all about her, the little noises that wooden houses make at night, though Betty-Ann, with her unnaturally sharpened senses, could hear a mouse gnawing a hundred feet from the east wing door, Aunt Sarai’s

footsteps made no sound, her rustling skirts made no sound. To have heard the rustle of her skirts, the noise of her footfalls, would have been like horrible music, yet anything would have been better than this horrible soundlessness, this complete awfulness of silence.

She was coming down the passage that led straight into the east wing now. Door after door faded out behind her slowly, inexorably, like hours being ticked off by a clock, gradually and yet with such awful unstopping sureness.

She was at the door of the east wing now.

She was through it. She was in the living-room. She might not come in; she might take the other of the two doors and go into the little dining-room. She might! She might!

She did not. She came towards the bedroom door. She came up to it and disappeared through it. She reappeared on the other side of it, dark against it in the clear pallor of the room, her hands outstretched, red sparkles in her ugly eyes as she looked at the child. And Betty-Ann knew it would be the end of all things when those hands touched her, she would be carried off to live forever and forever in some unknown world of horror with Aunt Sarai.

Again she tried to scream and again could not, with effort such as the dead might make, trying to rise from under stone. And yet it seemed as if her cry were answered. Gay's voice rang suddenly in her ear, rich and quick and strong.

"Betty-Ann!"

It was like a sword of white light piercing darkness. It broke the stone, and she knew that she had been asleep and now was waking. Aunt Sarai was still there, but he, too, was there. She screamed and screamed again, and clung to him in mad fear.

“Gay, it’s Aunt Sarai! She’s coming—she’s coming!” Her voice, in that shriek of unimaginable fear, was high and an agony to hear.

“It will not do her any good.” His voice was quiet and absolute, and his arm was warm and firm about her.

But Aunt Sarai was coming towards the bed!

He raised his free hand to the light-switch above him and the room blazed into electric radiance. The dreadful, advancing figure stood out in it, clearly as flesh, creeping on without hesitation, towards the bed. Betty-Ann’s shrieks rose in crescendo, she hid her face against him and tried to burrow into his body. Only the warm power that poured through her from it kept her sane.

He said quietly, looking at the advancing figure, his voice warm and kind, “Don’t be afraid, Betty. It can’t hurt you. It’s only a doll. Not Aunt Sarai, at all. The kind of a doll that some wicked people in Tibet know how to make to frighten others with. It isn’t really alive—it just does what it’s told to do as a mechanical doll does when it’s wound up.” He laughed a little. “You wouldn’t be afraid of a doll?”

But she screamed and clung to him, and peered out under his arm, teeth chattering, at the advancing shape.

“No! no! It’s Aunt Sarai—Aunt Sarai . . .”

“It,” he placed a quiet emphasis on the word, “is a doll. Like the one I told you of the lama’s making, the man that guarded his treasures.”

Aunt Sarai was almost upon them now. Her eyes did not look at Carew; they were fixed, in unwavering malevolence, upon the child. Her outstretched hands were barely two feet away, and Carew leaned forward and caught both those hands in one of his!

“It isn’t even solid. See!”

His fingers went through those hands, protruding through the phantom palms. He felt them, not flesh and not warm, loathsomely light and soft. The horrible eyes did not waver from the child.

“You see it doesn’t look at me; it doesn’t object to being touched by me. That’s because it doesn’t know I’m here; it can only do what it was made to do—frighten you. It was made to frighten you.”

Betty-Ann was staring at it in astounded wonder, horrified still, but puzzled. Gay had hold of Aunt Sarai—and she was doing nothing!

Carew was not looking at her. He was looking, straight and intensely, at the figure. It was his body, or rather the himself within it, that was rigid as stone now, stiff with some tremendous effort of the will.

He commanded, “Vanish! Inside you there is nothing. Become nothing!” and through his voice there rang authority and power.

The figure seemed to shake. Then to collapse, like a balloon. The tall erectness crumpled, as though the legs were going out from under it, and Betty-Ann saw the long skirts melting, fading into mists and then into air—and there was *nothing* underneath.

It was quivering where it hung in the air. The red eyes still stared at her, but all around them the face and the body were quivering and shaking so that they blurred. They were dissolving, fading, the face was growing so thin that she could see the pattern of the wall-paper on the wall behind it, she could see a chair through Aunt Sarai’s shoulder that had been so black and solid, and was only a shadow now.

The shadow fluttered and went out, like a dark candle blown out by the wind.

The face floated in the air for a second longer: a transparency through which everything behind it showed, the eyes leering with a final ugliness out of their melting setting. Then they too shook and wavered, leered for a moment out of empty air, and were gone.

She saw that Gay's hand was still outstretched, grasping air, and for some reason the sight struck her as amazingly funny. The stiff, strung wires inside her let go, and she collapsed into wild laughter, clapping her hands together.

He turned and laughed with her, naturally, but he had drawn his handkerchief from under his pillow and was wiping his face.

When he thought she had laughed long enough he said abruptly, "Stop!"

The electric crackle of his voice surprised her and for the second she did stop. He gave her no time to begin again, but laughed and pushed her back down into the bed.

"Go to sleep, Betty-Ann. You know now that there's nothing to be afraid of. And we've had excitement enough for one night."

Later he was to remember that speech with grim irony, but his matter-of-fact tone, the familiar sensation of the covers being tucked about her, made all excitement seem fantastic and dream-like to her then. Things had happened so fast: terror and horror and the coming-true of all grisly dreams, and then the melting, the very melting of Aunt Sarai, like mist before the sun. Only as she started to float off into the haze of her exhaustion she asked in a darting flash of consciousness and fear, "But if Aunt Sarai wasn't

real, if she was only a doll—who made her, Gay? Who wanted to scare me?"

"I can't tell you that," he said with a little laugh. "It's hardly the thing to accuse anyone without proof, Betty-Ann. And this is a cheap nasty thing to be accused of: frightening little girls. Besides, it doesn't matter very much now, does it? I can deal with him. And you won't be afraid of his dolls any longer—whether they're cats or aunts?"

She said a little uncertainly, "No." Everything was very strange. Somewhere there was a wicked magician after her, a horrible villain out of fairybooks. But Gay was strong, too, and Gay was helping her; he could dissolve bad magics. And the wicked one was a person, warm and alive, not dead and awful like Aunt Sarai. Her brain of a child, and of an exhausted child, accepted the fantastic situation as no adult mind could have. Her eyes closed.

She slept again, but Gaylord Carew sat by her, wakeful.

It seemed to him that the night was still alive and working, the array of its unseen legions reorganizing after the spectre's fall. He had set his will like an alarm clock to wake him when Betty-Ann should wake or when the spectre should draw near the bed, and this inner bell had aroused him to see her struggling in a dream the horror of which he had not, for a few seconds, been able to pierce. During his sleep some other mind had wrenched hers from the control of his mesmeric commands and plunged her into dark experiences that might have seemed to her to last for hours, minute-long though they had been, so radically are space and time altered on different planes.

Yet his heart sang now for victory. He had broken the back of fear. Betty-Ann had seen Aunt Sarai melted before her eyes; and the psychological effect of that would be

incalculable. He had stamped his humiliation of the Dark Powers, his exposure of their trickery, ineffaceably upon her mind. Always now she would know that there was something stronger.

He had not been sure that he could do it: destroy in a few moments the careful creation of months, into which might have gone some sinister, strange wreckage from the personality of the dead.

But it was done.

He wondered why the house did not seethe and flame around him with baffled fury and hate as he had expected. He had no personal vanity to be disappointed by the lack of those vibrations of raging defeat; but the lack was ominous. The room where he and Betty-Ann had always been so grimly companioned, even when no phantasm showed, felt deserted now. As if a tide had turned. Away from himself and the child, in some new direction.

Somewhere in his brain a spark flashed into light.

Elizabeth!

He sprang up abruptly. Why had he thought it safe to leave her up there in the dark alone, with what still roamed abroad in Witch House driven from the field It had chosen? A force as savage as a lion, and far more sinister, compelled, now or never, to recoup Its lost vantage, save Itself from utter and overwhelming defeat?

The last blow—and the hardest!

He rang the bell that connected the room with the servants' quarters. He must not leave Betty-Ann alone if he could help it; yet he knew it was safer to leave the child than the mother now. Knew it better than he knew.

Already, somewhere in the dark above him, Elizabeth was fighting her own battle, such battle as may be only upon

the slippery, sloping edge of hell.

Elizabeth too had slept soundly through the first watches of the night. But she never left the room where Betty-Ann slept to go to this other strange, disturbing one, whose vibrations of a man's occupancy, a man's presence, all set her subtly at war with herself, without fears that only the strongest effort of her will could keep thrust into the background of her mind.

There was no power to regulate them when she slept. They came out then and crawled through the hollows that her will had vacated. Waited, alert and ready to seize any chance to draw her back from the world whose doors sleep opens, into the dark, phantasmal universe of their own making. And tonight some unseen spider wove them into a web of sure and snaring pattern.

She thought that Betty-Ann was in danger, and that she heard the child's voice calling her, "Mother! Mother!" in that familiar tone of terror that always pierced her like a knife.

She sprang out of bed, pulling on her dressing-gown as she ran towards the door. When she unlocked it, the black sinister emptiness of the corridor faced her; she wondered, as she plunged into it, why the cries seemed to be coming from the main house and the second floor. Where was Carew, and why was Betty-Ann out of her own bed? What terrible thing had happened, was happening, under cover of the night?

Some dim sense of something wrong, of some falseness somewhere, warned her. But she was only half-awake, and all her being was one fiercely straining response to those

cries: a watchdog springing up at the accustomed summons.

She ran forward, calling, “Betty! Betty-Ann!” But the cries seemed to run away from her, down the corridor, always keeping the same distance ahead, always imploring her with undimming terror.

“Mother! Mother!”

Something told her suddenly, as she ran on and on down the winding corridor, that she ought to stop and go no farther; that she was in a maze and getting nowhere, unless into a trap. But Bety-Ann’s cries rang through her head again. There could be no mistake. There was no time to think. Her child was calling her, and in terror.

With the stubbornness that had made her defy Aunt Sarai as a child, that had once got her out of Witch House, and broken through the dark webs of her destiny, she refused to think. She ran on.

She came towards a door and the cries seemed to come from beyond it, muffled, receding. Without a second’s hesitation she jerked it open, sprang into the room beyond.

But it was not a room. Her foot, striking against the next step, told her that it was a stair, even before she saw the file of them winding away between walls, leading up into the darkness.

And at the same moment the door behind her closed softly, almost noiselessly.

She stood still a moment. There was only darkness and silence now. No more cries. She whirled upon the door and jerked at it, but it would not open. It had shut her in with soft, deliberate stealthiness, and now it stood there wall-like, barring her way back.

Her mind whirled out for a moment over a black and titanic abyss of terror, and then, sharply, she jerked it back. The self-assertive mental movement was like the click of a latch.

It was then that she actually awoke, looked about her.

“I’ve been dreaming. I thought I heard Betty-Ann crying, and it was all in my own head. And these are the attic stairs.”

She had not recognized them before. They had been an unknown road leading to unknown darkness. Now she saw them weirdly, in twin aspects. They were that and they were also the old familiar attic stairs that she had climbed so often with Joseph, in her childhood. The door had always had a springlock but it had never closed of itself unless a wind blew it.

And tonight there had been no wind.

She was trapped. She knew that above her, in those silent spaces under the roof, waited all the evil of Witch House, incarnate, ready, though she could not guess in what form it waited, why and how it waited.

For her.

She could not escape; if she beat the door and screamed no one would hear her. She would not be missed till morning. She could wait on the stairs; she did not have to go up; wherever it had been meant to draw her, her will was free now. But she did not think that she could stand long hours of waiting on those stairs, in the dark, wondering what might come down. And it seemed to her besides that it was written: There shall be no standing still; people must go either up or down.

She went up!

The stairs were winding and there was another door at the top of them. When she opened it she saw the attic: space and shadow: evilly waiting, like the stairs. But nothing more.

She went on, down the length of it, toward the little room that had been hers and Joseph's child-laboratory. It had been whitewashed, floor and walls and ceiling, since she had last seen it. It gleamed in the moonlight like the white ghost of a room, wan and weird and spectral.

Joseph stood beside a table in the middle of it, watching her.

"I wondered how long it would be before you had the courage to come up, Elizabeth. But you didn't keep me waiting long." He seemed to correct himself, "Not much longer."

He was speaking; he was really there, flesh and blood, though she had known, in the moment that she saw him, that he was more than flesh and blood. There was a darkness about him, like the evil on the stairs; but where she had seen them in twin aspects she was seeing him as one—a dark harmonious whole—and for the first time she knew, seeing him fully.

She said with steel in her voice, "When have I kept you waiting—before tonight?"

He said immovably, with a dark and still intensity, "For ten years, Elizabeth. For you. For *us.* I knew you would have to come, but it has hurt, waiting. I've worked to make it sooner. In your mind and heart; I know how. In other ways. First, with this."

He lifted something from the table, and she cried out as the moon shone on the blade; drew back, her dark eyes

asking his an incredulous and burning question, “Li Wan’s knife!”

“Yes. Don’t misunderstand: I could not be jealous of Hugh Stone, Elizabeth. He could have so little of you, reach so little, though I hated to think of him pawing your body. It was so he would no longer stand between us.

“I’ve always kept track of you two. I knew when he lost his job; I knew, in other ways, how worried and miserable he was. Oh, I sent out my mind to search his in the night-time! Misery and hate teach you how to do that; it was good for my training. And I worked on his misery; I watered it and made it grow. It was a perfect receiver for the kind of thought-waves I sent out.

“Aunt Sarai knew why I wanted to send you that knife; she was very interested in seeing how my experiment would succeed. I shut myself up for days looking at the dagger and thinking, thinking *at* him. The knife is only a symbol, of course, but it’s useful—the death-impregnated knife set before the prepared mind, it’s like fire and wood.”

“You *made* Hugh kill himself?”

Her eyes were dark and wide, black as the stair-pit. The blow upon her mind seemed to have stunned it a little. He laughed gently, appreciatively, with the satisfaction of one who has scored a desired point.

“He was weak enough to let me. You did not choose well when you picked that substitute for me. No man could ever be anything but that to you—a substitute for me. You ‘set at defiance your life’s design,’ Elizabeth, as much as Peer Gynt ever did; I had to set it straight again. You’ve always been caught in the tide; did you think you could clutch at straws and not break them?”

She had a sick feeling that he was Fate's self standing there, tall and black, reading out inexorable, unalterable doom. She fought to get back to realities; they were only themselves: Elizabeth and Joseph. *Joseph and Elizabeth.* But what were Joseph and Elizabeth? Their full selves, on all dimensions, not the limited selves she knew. Reality was so hard to grasp; it would not stay solid and simple; it widened and spread and darkened.

She said very quietly, "It's true then. He couldn't live—married to me. I am why he is dead; and I never even made him happy.'

"Because you could not give him what was mine. You bewitched him to his death; you couldn't help playing the witch, Elizabeth, even when you were running away from witchcraft. And that's enough of him."

"Is it? I wonder, for me. Why did you take the dagger back? To show me, while you told this?" She was regarding him levelly now; she had pulled herself up out of the dark vista that was too like a sea.

"No. I had another use for it. Don't look so horrified." He stopped and smiled at her, and his eyes were deep and glowing. "It won't shed much blood, Elizabeth. Only enough of yours and mine to mix in the bowl there while you swear yourself to me. Witch's marriage. You remember the rites we read of in this same room long ago? The dagger's been defiled by him, but so have you. I must make you both clean again."

"Clean?" She stared at him, and at the silver bowl upon the table, and, with a deep and understanding horror, around the little white room. Thought of her aloneness with him here, at the top of the house where none could hear them, almost turned her sick; but she resolutely fought it

off; she knew that he wanted her to look at that image, and be weakened by it.

"I never would have sworn myself to any man—or *thing*—by those rites, Joseph. You are stark mad if you think that you can ever have me now."

"I will have you. You will have me, even after you know that I've done far more than rid you of a husband you never wanted. Look." He was still smiling, but the smile was suddenly like flame leaping out of him, onto his face. The whole man was flame, desperate, exultant, fiercer than fire; and yet coldly calculating, planning with icy sureness. She knew that he was about to strike another blow at her self-control and braced herself.

He put down the knife; pulled down his coat and opened his shirt at the shoulder. Teeth-marks showed there, a red unhealed wound.

She looked at him blankly and he smiled more fierily.

"Your dog William Tell made those. You remember when Betty-Ann said he caught the hare by the shoulder, the hare that watched them in the garden? If I had been a shade less quick it would have been my throat—and Aunt Sarai wouldn't have bothered her any more, my dear."

She stared at him, her eyes like black holes in white paper. "You Joseph? *You!* A *hare?"*

"Not my physical body, of course. But I can go out in my subtle one, my *Ka,* as the Egyptians called it. The Double, the etheric body. I've learned that. And, not being concrete, it can change into the shape I think it into. Evenings, in the drawings-room, when I sat with my back to the fire and you thought I dozed, I've crept out of my body to her window. Only when Quincy did doze; he might have suspected and harmed me; for a *Ka* is so nearly physical that it can be

wounded, and its wounds are reproduced in the physical body."

"William Tell—"

"Inconvenienced me. I can read moods at a distance; I can even shape them sometimes. But I wanted to study Betty-Ann carefully. I took that form to watch her, and to work on her a little. But the dog was too good a watchdog; he had to die."

She said, white-lipped, but with a sudden savagery in her eyes, flame leaping to answer his, "You have been doing all this to Betty-Ann? You?"

"Yes. I was working on her thoughts the first evening she saw the portrait. Later I made a phantom of Aunt Sarai; I never dared try to see if I could evoke her herself. She was too malicious; she might have acted independently of me."

Her eyes burned. "I should have killed you, if I had known!"

He laughed. "I know you would have. You have that much fire in you, Elizabeth. That much of the tigress. That's why you're worth saving, why I want you."

"And you expect to win my love by torturing my little girl?"

He said calmly, "I never meant for you to know that it was I, Elizabeth—at least until after you would not care. *I* planned to be her healer, to cure her by hypnosis as I could have very easily, by stopping what I had started and then leaving her mind alone, to win your gratitude, and then presently your love again. You would have felt that only I could protect her here."

Still with that the same deep quiet intensity of fury, she said, "You took more chance of killing her, of driving her mad."

He shrugged. “That was your fault, my dear. You were too stubborn to let me treat her. I might have had to drive her mad for a time. But I never meant to kill her. I’ve no love and no hate for her. She owes me something; except for her I should have won you back from Hugh Stone long ago. Why shouldn’t the barrier between us be turned into a tool? And she was exquisitely plastic material to work with —a child: clever, sensitive, of our own blood. It was so easy to work her into a perfect fever. It has been a singularly fascinating experiment. I’ve had some artistic triumphs— not spiteful ones; I don’t waste force in spite.”

She cried out passionately, “What do you waste in it— you?” Her hand rose, quick as a striking snake, then fell to her side again without touching his smiling face; she stared at him with baffled, horrified eyes. “It wouldn’t mean anything to strike you, and, besides, you’re not clean enough to touch.”

He looked, oddly enough, a little disappointed. That was for a second only.

“I’ll own it would have been better not to have done it. It would have been better to have taken you at once as I shall now. I’ve wasted time—time that could have been exquisite. Every hour of your beauty—I’ve counted all the hours for ten years, Elizabeth: all the hours I’ve missed.”

His voice was vibrant and thrilling, like a spell. He leaned towards her; she felt fire flowing out from him, intense with a more than earthly heat. He put out his hand.

“I’ve waited a long time, Bess, such a long time. Does it matter what I’ve done while I waited, what you’ve done? It doesn’t; and you won’t imagine that it does long. When we’re together as we were meant to be, all these things that are so important to you now will dwindle to nothing,

you'll be your whole self, your real self, as you never can be while you run away from me. God and goddess, witch and devil—they're only silly sets of words. God and the Devil are only two different ways of looking at one Greatness—every man can be god or devil, according to the measure of his ability to draw Power into himself from the source.

"And we'll have power. We'll build up Witch House again—greater than it ever was before. We were born to do it. Together. Nothing can get in the way of that long. Nothing can stop it. You and I, Elizabeth. Together. King and Queen. You know the dreams; you've dreamed them too. Let yourself love, my dearest. That's all that's lacking now—our love."

She drew back from him, very white. She had a queer feeling that he stood at the head of a spiral: a vast long spiral made up of the house, and all the generations that had lived in the house, a spiral that was curling round her like a snake. They were all there, all one in him, all alive, all demanding. He was a man and a flame. He was an old vast darkness.

Identity became an infinite, terrifying, and confusing thing. She said, her white face wondering, "What are you? Who are you? You might be the house, Joseph; you might always have been Joseph."

He laughed. "Have been the first Joseph? I don't know. I've been able to see him here, dreaming, see what it was he built this house for, what he meant to do. I've seen him tortured, and running away from France; I've seen him here, being hampered by that girl as you will not hamper me, planning, building. I may be he; I may be some one else cast in his mold. Another weaver carrying on his pattern. Or we may be different avatars of, emanations, shoots from

the same Immortal. If all men are gods, who knows where the real, unearthly personality is? How many men and women can manifest it, simultaneously even, like different facets of the same jewel? That doesn't matter, either. I am Joseph, as he was Joseph, and Joseph means 'to add.' As your name means 'God of the Oath,' in Hebrew, Elizabeth—the oath that binds you to me."

"There is no oath between you and me."

"There has been. For more ages than we can dream of. You accepted that oath by your birth, Elizabeth. And I will add as he added. There shall be strength in this place again." He took a step forward, toward her. "I'm already master of Witch House, as you will be its mistress. Its perfect mistress, before you leave this room."

She flamed back at him with equal passion, "No! I hate you now. After what you've done to Betty-Ann, I couldn't ever stop loathing you, and still be I! You can't manage that, Joseph; it's bare truth, beyond magic! I couldn't bear to touch you, even just to kill you."

He looked into her eyes and smiled. "Love me or hate me, it's all one, Bess. Whichever passion you're flaming with, the fire will turn into what I want—merge us, when you're in my arms. It will open you to me, end my way. You will be mine: one flesh and one soul."

She was trembling now, like an animal, with fear and fury. The white room spun round her. She understood. She was hot with rage, yet through her inmost heart cold was creeping, sick and draining and intolerable cold. Hate for him filled her to the brim as if she had been a cup, and yet this hate she could not conquer was the measure of her weakness. The dreadful gateway! By rousing the passions

of that side of her which was his kin, he had laid her open to the invasion of his.

It was so little, her purity of purpose. Like a candle in the vast encircling darkness of his will. Like a child pitting its strength against adult strength. He was old in evil and she so young, so young and new, in good.

Too late to pull herself together and set her spirit against him now. She had nothing but her body, the body that could only kick and scratch and be violated—possessed, as her soul would be. The body and the passions that were so much weaker than his.

There were candles on the table and he was lighting them. They made his shadow dance on the wall in many places, wildly as the worshippers at the Witches' Sabbath. She heard his voice.

"It will be better this way: more worthy of you and me. A greater rapture to come together in open battle than if you had walked into my net. Hate-love turning into something greater than either hate or love, as others know love, not beginning in any mawkish lie."

Then the thing happened. Of a sudden the limpness went out of her body where she leaned against the wall. She straightened; a rosiness came into her face, light leaped into it, warm and bright as victory. Clearly, suddenly her laughter rang through that room of pale darkness. Like a spent swimmer's, whose feet suddenly touch bottom.

"You've waited too long, Joseph; it's too late now. You might have been able to do this when I was a girl—have taken me and un-selfed me and made me over into the mistress of Witch House; there was one side of me that you called to then. But never now; you can never reach me now,

never have any more of me than Hugh Stone had. Because it's Gaylord Carew I love—with all of me!"

She saw his dark face change as he put the candles down, some white spasm flicker over it. She saw him pick up the dagger and come towards her, and the light did not die out of her face, or change.

"You can hurt me, but you can never have me now. Call it having—whatever you do in this room tonight. It won't be. No more than what you said you weren't jealous of Hugh for having. I love him. And that doesn't bind me—it sets me free!"

"It does not. Nothing can ever set you free from me." But his voice lacked the old ring of power. His face was savage, no longer fierce and sure.

"Nothing, Joseph?" Carew's question clanged through the room like the note of a bell: calm and clear and yet crisp with a force, a vigor, beyond all passion, all excitement.

He stood tall and straight in the doorway, his shoulders filling it; and he smiled faintly.

"If nothing, so little a thing as nothing, can set her free, then *something* should be much better able to do it. But she has already done it herself." He smiled at the woman, and his smile was intimate as an embrace; it seemed to leap past the man beside her, and take her in his arms.

Joseph caught her arm, with no semblance of the master, the dark god, now. He was like an animal clutching at prey another threatened to tear away.

"Go, Carew! If you don't, I will kill her before you can reach her."

"I have already reached her; as I was coming up the stairs I heard her say you never could. What is there left to

fight for, Joseph?”

“What I have always fought for. To get through her dreams to her.”

“With that?” Carew’s tone was dry as he glanced at the knife in the other’s hand. “I thought you had it; you are not superstitious enough to be afraid the death-impregnated weapon might turn on the man who had impregnated it. You didn’t accept the legend that fully, though you were superstitious enough to use the knife.”

Elizabeth cried out, “You knew, Gay—you knew?”

His dark eyes met hers, grave but a little smiling. “I’ve known for certain only since you told me of that fight between him and Quincy. I’ve waited for him to open your eyes. You saw an image built up by your own childhood loyalty and the glamor he threw over your mind; he had to show himself to you in another guise. Why should I have wasted force trying to do what he could do infinitely better?”

Joseph laughed fiercely. “Because you knew you couldn’t do it, Carew, so you had to throw the game into my hands!”

“The game is not played out yet.” Carew’s glance flicked over the knife again. “You won’t need that. We shall all three die if we stay here long. One of the candles by the caskets must have fallen on the carpet. Most of the first floor of the main house is in flames.”

Elizabeth cried sharply, “Betty-Ann—”

“—Is on the beach with Julia. I should have been up here sooner if I had not had to see to that.”

Joseph said, “We shall stay here.”

But the fire in his eyes was dulled, and behind his face something seemed to have fallen, leaving it blanched and withered. So a king of Atlantis might have looked, gazing

down from the mountains upon the sea swallowing up his kingdom, depriving him forever of all that he had ruled. The house he had meant to rebuild, the woman he had thought won: all were being swept from him; he stood stripped upon the brink of dark and icy emptiness, of failure and defeat.

Carew watched him without fear or triumph. His rich voice was crisp and even. “Fortunately we have a little time to consider that. The fire hadn’t quite reached the wings when I came up, and there are the staircases at the ends of them. Your God of strength seems to have failed you somewhere, Joseph. This is a very negative victory: to destroy because you can no longer hope to build. Is that the evolution of the strong?”

Fire blazed up again in Joseph. He laughed fiercely, savagely, like a great wind hurling trees before it, in the stark violence of its elemental strength.

“So you think, because I have failed, you can persuade me at last that all nature is a lie and your mawkishness evolution—talk your sickly light into my soul and her out of my hands? No! It is my own fault that I failed. I was too much in love with subtlety; I was drunk on the discovery of it, and forgot the value of force; I should have struck tonight’s blow long ago. Then you would never have come to Witch House. And there again I was too subtle! I poured all the jealousy I might have felt for you into Quincy; I set him burning with the fever that I dared not let use up my own strength! I directed his thoughts to your death—your death that would save us our heritage, Witch House, the woman meant for us. And he was always dry wood for fire!”

“It was the kind of thing he would have thought of, anyway,” Carew said. “You only fed the fire.” He was

watching the main attic through which thin wreaths of smoke were creeping, a fog that smelled of burning drifting up the stairs.

“I know that; but I did feed it; I fed it well! I gave him no rest night or day. He was the sword I meant to kill you with, and I hoped to break the sword in the killing. I could not have let him live; he never could have borne to see Elizabeth mine. He would have been as dangerous as a mad dog in the house. One doesn’t respect a mad dog’s intelligence, but one kills him, all the same.”

“Him, but not his madness. Betty-Ann says that Aunt Sarai knocked over the candle by Quincy’s head when she got down out of her portrait; that something seemed to whisper to her that Aunt Sarai would. I’m not sure what she is talking about, but you never dictated that detail of the dream, Joseph.”

Joseph’s eyes flashed darkly for a moment; then he laughed again with savage, self-mocking bitterness.

“No. He did. He got into her mind; he stole strength from her body—a living body! He used my own plan, my own creature.”

“And you had read his plans in Zoia’s mind; it was glass to anyone; it had been his toy and tool so long. You flashed her the telepathic command to give that cry that lured him into his own trap. If it had closed over all three of us you would have been triumphant, rid of all your dangers at once, and in Elizabeth’s eyes another victim—the man he had tried to martyr.”

“Yes; and his death, instead of profiting me, would have destroyed me by fire even if you had rested content on your victory over Aunt Sarai’s image and never come up here.” Joseph was smiling again; stone by stone he was rebuilding

his shattered inner temple. The sheer strength of the man could face his mistakes and hold them reparable, in another life if not in this.

Carew wondered at the pitiful gigantic waste of it: strength and intellect falling back to re-assertion of the primitive supremacy of force: twisting all things to prove this last basic contention that might was right. Megalomania blazing up again, unquenchable, from the ashes of defeat.

“And now, by the fall of a candle he defeats me—he who could never have defeated me alive. It is because I played too subtle a game, Carew. I should have dealt with my enemies one by one. He was too coarse a snare to take you in; I should have done it myself.”

As he ceased speaking the table rose, jumping up from the floor like a living thing, on its four unbending legs. Elizabeth screamed as it hurtled itself through the air, with the speed and force of a cannon-ball, straight at Carew.

There was no room, in that narrow space, for him to dodge it; it came headlong, on a level with his forehead.

He stood still and met it; the broad wood surface crashed against his outspread palms and stopped there, the force of its charge broken by some current that vibrated with equal strength through those outstretched, checking hands.

“I thought you would try to, Joseph.”

Elizabeth had torn herself from her cousin when she screamed; his hand, in that moment of fierce, super-physical effort, had relaxed. She reached Carew. He held her, his hand closing fast about hers, warm and strong; and looked past her into the dark, twisted face of the Adversary. He spoke without triumph, calmly as a man that tries to sow a seed in the dense darkness of the earth.

“You say you should have never have let me come to Witch House. That’s true, Joseph. True because what you stand for can’t stand against what I stand for. Because, face to face, I could defeat all your phenomena, because my presence could always bring safety, you dared not play the waiting game you might have won; you were afraid that if I left, Elizabeth might go with me.”

Carew waited a moment, but from the dark presence there came no answer; Joseph seemed still to be gasping for breath. Then Carew dared wait no longer. He turned Elizabeth toward the door.

The main attic was filled with smoke now. They could not see each other’s faces as they dived through the hot, odorous cloud of it. A blast of heat met them as they started down the staircase, scorching them like a wind from hell

In the lower hall flames were leaping. No need to ask if the wings under them were burning now. Witch House was meeting the ancient fate of witches, the smoke and flame that had made hideous its inner chambers translated at last into the physical.

Zoia had hung long pale curtains at the windows of the room into which the west wing staircase descended. They were blazing torches now, and a tongue of flame from one had reached out and was gnawing the staircase hungrily. The flames were crackling with an eager gayety, a riotous, dancing joy as though they were making a meal long wanted, long waited for.

They were racing with fire. They heard it hiss beneath their feet as they went down the stairs: Elizabeth held her robe close about her to avoid the licking tongues. They reached the foot of the stairs; heard a crash above them as

they crossed the blazing room and knew that only by the narrowest of margins had they won the race. Then the door was open, letting in the cold of night. And in the safety of that cold they turned to look back, feeling once again that watchfulness of Witch House. The upper part of the stairs had fallen behind them.

Joseph stood at the top of that column of fire, visible for all the smoke that eddied round him. He said, and his voice was low and calm as they had ever heard it, ironic even, “I stumbled over the table. It made me a minute late. A man cannot afford failures.”

Then once again, in his own way, he blazed, “Goodbye, for this time! It does not matter whether I’m right or wrong; whether I am defeated forever or for only now. If God Himself has betrayed His own pattern of the universe, then I’ll be truer than God, I’ll match it and myself against you—and Him! Even if I can never win you, Elizabeth, Ell never give up trying. I’ll come again when you don’t know me, I’ll lie and plot and kill. One life won’t end it, nor a hundred thousand lives. You may have her, Carew, but you’ll never have her in peace long! Ages won’t tire me; eternity itself will not; I’ll follow you through every life and every birth, through every star.”

Carew said, “No. Some day even you will grow up, Joseph.” He added, “I’ll go back for the servants now. You had better try for one of the windows. We can reach you more easily from there.”

Joseph smiled. “So you are fool enough even to try to save my life? But I will take no chances of maiming myself by a fall from one of those windows; I will not lie helpless while Elizabeth watches you magnanimously doctor me. There was a sentence passed in France nearly three

hundred years ago, and there's a price to pay for failure. I won't need this."

He flung Li Wan's dagger down into the blaze that licked up towards him.

"I'm not afraid of fire. I've lived in it too long. I've had to pretend to be cold too long. I've burned inside ever since that night you went to Hugh Stone, Elizabeth. To burn outside, that can't be so great a change. Until we meet again, my dear."

He turned and walked back, down the flaming hall.

"What were you so long saving, Mother?" Betty-Ann pounced upon her, blue eyes dancing with excitement in her white little face. "Gay said you and he'd be awhile saving things, but you'd be all right, and I was to stay right here and not stir, or worry. And I think Julia has worried, but I didn't. I knew Gay wouldn't let anything happen when he said it wouldn't."

She skipped a little in Elizabeth's arms and laughed.

"I *have* stirred, I've danced up and down, but only right here, and I don't think he meant that. I know it's awful for a house to burn down, but we won't have to live in it any more now, and it's so thrilling, watching the fire dance! It acts as if it was having such a good time, Mother. It looks so free and glad!"

Elizabeth looked back. The flames were indeed dancing, clustered like red exultant beings upon Witch House, curling and leaping over and around it, shooting through the windows, swaying and darting about the eaves. Dimly through the fireshot gloom she could see the little attic window that had lit those dark games of her childhood. Too

far to see whether a face made a white blur against the darkness. He had had time to reach the attic by now if he ever reached it.

A crash, a hissing roar, and the roof of Witch House fell. The seething maw closed over it like a sea. The surging flames stamped it down, red dancers waving blazing arms to the heavens. Witch House blazed like a gigantic bonfire, a stupendous, scarlet pile of smoking, writhing flame.

Like the pyre of an invisible giant, burning away with its dark burden, in the emptiness of night.

There was a light rosiness in the east; the sun was creeping up softly, surely, over the edge of the world. Color oozed through the pale tremendous vastness of the sky.

Elizabeth sat on a salvaged sofa on the shore, Betty-Ann's sleeping head in her lap. There was no bar between them and the heavens, no walls around them, only sea and sky and the queer wideness and flatness and loneliness of space. Where the house had loomed tall and dark, a black ridge of ashes still smouldered, thin jets of smoke curling up here and there like the last breaths of a dragon. Symbolic, with the finality of futility.

Space.

They breathed space; the woman, sitting very quietly, heard it, silence so cold and utter as to be like sound. In that widened universe she felt immeasurably small and immeasurably free, dizzy with that sense of illimitable space.

Gaylord Carew came down the beach, through the cold morning air that was as rich as wine, alive with the fiery

vigor of spring. The spaces burst into sunshine and flower. He stopped and smiled down at her.

“Remembering?”

“No. Wondering. I never knew before how big the sky is. The house has always been there. Always when I was a child here, whenever I looked over my shoulder. And all the years when I was away with Hugh, a picture in the back of my mind, always there, between me and the horizon. And now it’s gone. Oh, I know that’s only a symbol, but it means so much. The other doesn’t.” A sweep of her hand indicated the mass of ashes. “It’s not pretty, but it’s past. Over. Burned out. As he will burn out, unless he changes into something else.”

“He will change. We’ll all change. He only wastes time. Living is changing—growth—expansion. Life becoming wider, more beautiful.” Gaylord Carew’s rich voice was muted and mellow.

He put his arm about her; it lay warm and strong between her and the chilled wood of the sofa. “The boat is waiting to take us to the mainland, Elizabeth.”

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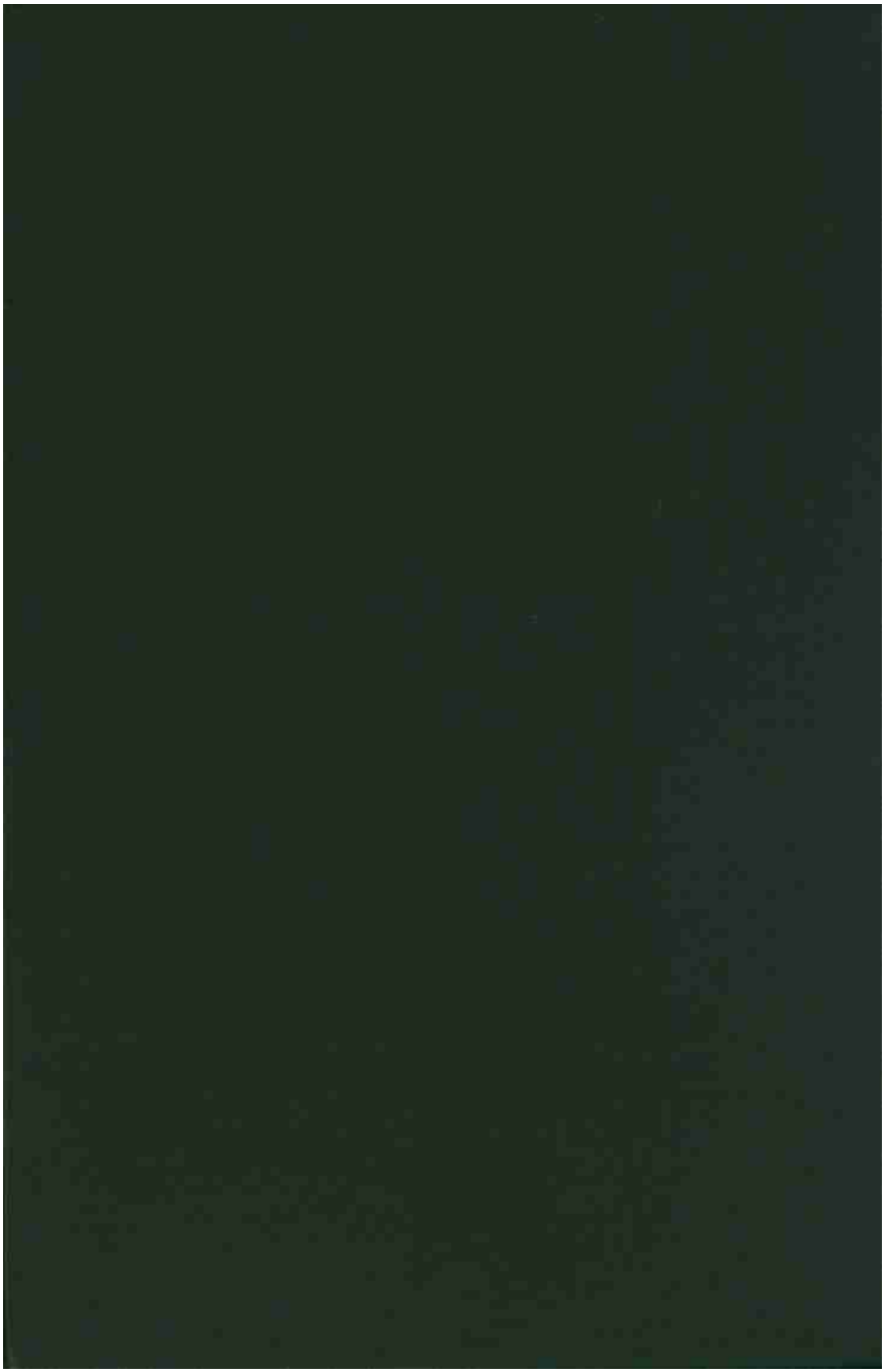

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